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ABSTRACT

This study argues that community college composition instructors need to develop their own body of research and scholarship on theories of writing, one that is not solely dependent upon four-year college theory, but that works as an equal partner in the composition theory debate. The premise that community college students are different from four-year college and university students is the backbone of the study. The author interviewed approximately 100 students at Northern Virginia Community College about their individual writing processes. She also studied the literature and kept a journal of her own teaching experiences during three semesters. In the debate over whether to insist that students learn standard English, both sides make valid points. Her own students felt standard English was necessary if they were to participate in the workplace yet they did not allow the conventions of English to silence their private voices. In addition, the paper argues that the writing handbook can be stifling if adhered to inflexibly but that it can have value when used as a guide, allowing for a dynamic relationship between the text, the class, and the teacher. The author uses chaos theory to examine educational dilemmas. (Contains 69 references.) (NB)

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Seeking Authority in Composition Theory: Leadership From the Community College Classroom

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Arts at George Mason University.

By

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Bachelor of Arts
Georgetown University, 1978
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Spring Semester 1997
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DEDICATION

This doctoral project is dedicated to my husband, John, and our three children, Brendan, Maureen, and Colleen. They make me laugh. They make me smile. They make me think.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my students and colleagues at Northern Virginia Community College, I owe a great deal of gratitude. They taught me the value of teaching a student population that receives little recognition in higher education.

The members of my doctoral committee represent the years of work I enjoyed as a graduate student at two universities. Dr. James Slevin of Georgetown University served as my initial guide in the journey toward my doctorate. When I was a student in the Master of Arts program at Georgetown, his enthusiasm for composition scholarship inspired me to teach and research this area of English. His participation brings my work full circle.

Dr. Richard Gossweiler of Germanna Community College and George Mason University constantly displayed respect and admiration for his students at both institutions. His suggestions and comments about teaching at the community college level motivated me to improve my own pedagogical style. He offered practical advise when I was confused about a classroom activity, and he encouraged me when I encountered obstacles with this study.

Dr. Dulce M. Cruz of George Mason University was the chair of my doctoral project. Our meetings were always provocative. She frequently instructed me to "unpack" my own scholarship so that I could determine what I really meant to communicate to my audience. She patiently lead me through the doctoral process and constantly served as a sympathetic audience for my ideas and convictions.

A special thanks to my parents, Jim and Fran Nankervis; their prayers and enthusiasm prompted me to move forward. Hopefully, the completion of this study will mean a lower phone bill for my supportive sister, Maria Thorsen. A warm hug to Nancy Yarborough, she patiently listened and quietly nodded every time I needed a friend.

Phyllis Macey helped demystify the workings of the computer and the printing of this project. I thank her for her time and diligence.

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ABSTRACT

SEEKING AUTHORITY IN COMPOSITION THEORY: LEADERSHIP FROM THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE CLASSROOM

Victoria N. Salmon, D.A.

George Mason University, 1997

Director: Dr. Dulce M. Cruz

This dissertation encourages community college educators to create their own body of composition research and scholarship. The problem is that although composition scholarship is thriving, most of it focuses on the conditions and needs of the four-year college student. Therefore, this project centers on three semesters of teaching journals, surveys, and interviews with students from Northern Virginia Community College, Alexandria, Virginia. From this research, the author created composition theory which specifically speaks to the community college experience. She addresses the issues of teaching standard English, the conflicts between private and public language, and the application of chaos theory to the composition classroom. This dissertation is a guide for community college educators who want to create theory from their own pedagogical technique and classroom environment.

Preface

At a departmental meeting, my colleagues on the English faculty discussed their frustrations with the composition errors of their students who are non-native speakers of English. Several instructors felt thwarted in their attempts to teach their students the nuances of standard English and how to apply the rules of grammar to the students' writings. We also discussed the absence of articles in our Asian students' essays, the confusion surrounding direct quotations and paraphrasing, and the omission of a clear, concise thesis statement.

Several faculty members offered suggestions about how to approach these problems; each person focused on pedagogical issues and solutions. After a few minutes into the conversation, I raised my hand and offered my own suggestion. I told my colleagues that I had recently read a book by Helen Fox which addressed these same issues. Although her students at the University of Michigan were graduate students, they too were non-native speakers of English and confronted some of the composition problems our own students faced. I was surprised and somewhat embarrassed by their reactions. One or two faculty members stared down at their papers. Others ate their pizza. Only one person asked me the name of the book. I thought that my suggestion would encourage a theoretical

conversation, or at least an interest in how one critic views the problem. Nothing happened, so I quietly sat back and sipped my soda.

Once again, I recognized that my colleagues – like most community college educators – were more interested in practice than theory. Their interest in pedagogical techniques emphasized a marginalization process which evolved from years of teaching on the boundaries of higher education.

Marginalization, a term familiar to many composition critics, is not often discussed in community college faculty meetings. Historically though, the two-year schools, their faculty, and their students have been marginalized from the larger academic community. Years ago, the creation of these schools allowed four-year colleges and universities to focus on research and scholarship rather than teaching younger, less mature men and women. Demonstrating a commitment to teach these students – and a variety of others – today's community college faculty has little time to investigate or to publish essays in journals in their individual disciplines. As a result, the community college instructor lacks authority in higher education; she rarely participates in the research and scholarship which affect her own classroom.

For example, over the past two decades composition theory has made an impressive entry into the field of English at the university level in the United States. Numerous critics have diagnosed and discussed the various elements of

the composition process which they have witnessed among their own students. Significant theories have been developed by these critics, and the dialogue rigorously continues. The problem is that although composition scholarship is thriving, most of it focuses on the conditions and needs of the four-year college student. Therefore, critics who write and publish their work about composition emphasize the authority of the four-year college or university and overlook the authority of the community college. They essentially ignore a segment of the population involved in college level composition classes: community college students and their faculty. The aim of this study is to present to community college educators one method of creating theory and scholarship from experiences and praxis. To acquire authority in the academic community, instructors and students of two-year colleges must become full participants in the composition debate.

When the community college is recognized by the larger academic community, it is usually within the context of a personal experience. For instance, respected composition critic, Anne Ruggles Gere of the University of Michigan, acknowledges the students who are served in the two-year college and applauds the work of community college instructors in her essay, "Stories Out of School." At the outset of the essay, Professor Gere identifies herself as "an outsider but an involved and sympathetic observer"(9). She celebrates her own

children's as well as other students' academic successes in the two-year college. She agrees with Marlene Griffith and Ann Connor when she states that "a diminished community college system represents an enormous loss to our society"(15). Most importantly, Gere recommends that the stories about community colleges be told through various methods – journals, conferences, and publications. Yes. However, her article's placement in *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* is not necessarily "out of school"(17). Gere narrates a story this audience already knows. This is a text dedicated to publishing "articles for teachers of English at two-year colleges and teachers of the first two years of English at the college or university level"(*TETYC* pamphlet). Perhaps, publishing this work in *College Composition and Communication* or *College English* – two publications Gere has written for in the past – would have benefited a much wider audience, one that includes a greater number of professional educators and administrators in composition and English departments across the country.

Gere's 1996 essay reflects much of the research that I have been doing for the past three years. To better serve my two-year college students, I determined that I needed to enter the theory-making process. My journey initially began out of obligation to my students. I found that practical proposals which center on classroom situations similar to my own exist, yet they were rare. I then decided that community college instructors owe their students, themselves, and the

composition community at-large theory distinctive to the two-year college classroom. My journey progressed from obligation to wonder. I began to ask questions, to reflect upon my own classroom experiences, and to write about my perceptions of composition theory in relation to the community college classroom.

As an adjunct instructor teaching composition at Northern Virginia Community College, I taught over 400 students at two campuses: Alexandria and Woodbridge. The diverse and multicultural atmosphere at the Alexandria campus provided an excellent example for investigation and exploration of multiple issues in the composition classroom.

As I approached my project more systematically, I surveyed my students on issues particular to composition theory. My goals for this survey were to address the needs of my underprepared students and to become better aware of their efforts to concentrate on the challenges of writing formal, standard English. I asked my students about their reactions when revising or rewriting the drafts of their essays, about the value of the specific writing textbook we were using, and about their individual problems with grammar and mechanics.

My interviews with approximately 100 students about their individual writing processes enhanced my understanding of how community college students cope with the frustration and tension of attending school while meeting the needs of their jobs and their families. In these one-on-one conferences, the students

often clarified the obstacles they faced conforming to the demands of standard English, and the cultural barriers they encountered while trying to understand the nuances of the American system of communication. Conferences with these students confirmed my desire to reveal the invisible, marginalized community college student as a crucial, meaningful member of the college composition community.

I spent three years collecting and evaluating this data. I viewed the material through the many roles my professional life demands – teacher, student, researcher, advisor, observer, participant, and colleague. As I studied my journals and interviews, I constantly read and re-read published scholarship on composition theory and realized that my work has a place in the dialogue. Discussions with professors and colleagues about reoccurring themes and issues prompted me to reflect upon the differences between composition instruction in two and four-year schools. The rigors of research and writing convinced me that established work in the discipline offered composition theory to the community college in general, yet rarely spoke to the community college experience in particular. My professors' critiques of various portions of my doctoral project validated my claim that community college instructors and their students must be fully incorporated into the composition theory conversation. A weaving of the journals, surveys, interviews, and scholarship into one project punctuates my claim that community

college educators need to create their own body of work which is not solely dependent upon four-year college theory, but research and scholarship which works as an equal partner in the composition theory debate.

My study begins with an introduction into the history of the community college, and this historical review demonstrates that the two-year schools have existed on the border of American higher education since their creation. A profile of Norther Virginia Community College explains the mission and goals of an urban community college and summarizes the demographics of the student population which enters my composition classroom. Because the two-year school proudly anoints itself as a teaching institution, I included some of my research on pedagogy and the college classroom. This chapter models how to begin the process of developing composition theory based on praxis.

The premise that community college students are different from four-year college and university students is the backbone of this study. A description of the two-year college "learner" and a discussion about the open access admissions policy support this premise. Three journals which present three semesters of teaching in the community college classroom reveal my efforts to make meaning from my experiences within the classroom. They help situate my positions as educator and as theorist. At first, I simply cataloged academic activities, but then I began to include my reactions, discomforts, and struggles. The process of

integrating my actions as an instructor with my questions as a theorist generated the remainder of the study.

To position myself in the composition dialogue, I examined theorists from four-year colleges and universities and determined which parts of their research and scholarship relate to work in the community college composition classroom. These theorists are discussed in the bibliographic review. Work on standard English and public vs. private language originated from a frustration that critics in these fields did not include the community college student in their work. My study of chaos theory introduced me to an aspect of science which exhibited an acceptance of fragmentation and complexity which are a constant presence in modern life. I used chaos theory to examine why one particular semester did not seem successful and to introduce the process of interconnecting two distinct academic disciplines into a new theoretical debate.

The final sections of this doctoral study include a call to action for all community college educators. The last two chapters discuss reasons why educators need to research composition theory and suggestions about how they can formulate their own writing philosophies. Constructing theory and sharing research about the two-year college composition experiences are substantial contributions to the writing community.

A Brief History of the Community College
And a Profile of
Northern Virginia Community College

The ambiguous history of the community college reflects the institution's marginalized status within American higher education. No definite dates, nor absolute data confirms the commencement of the two-year college's beginnings; Thomas Diener identifies this as a "hazy, time-dimmed past"(6). However, the pedagogical attitudes and flexible qualities of the community college have evolved over decades. The schools refuse to remain stagnant; they are constantly pioneering new areas of education and community service.

The unique American institution now known as the community college developed from a number of educational avenues, several of which were deliberately designed to place the community college on the borders of post-secondary education. One particular avenue was several university administrators' proposal to hand over the first two years of college to separate institutions which would become dedicated to nurturing and preparing freshman and sophomore students. The universities would then be able to dedicate their missions to more sophisticated and specialized teaching and research. The "universities would be responsible for the higher-order scholarship, while the lower schools would provide general

and vocational education to students through age nineteen or twenty"(Cohen and Brawer 6).

Those university administrators who endorsed this proposal were William Rainey Harper of the University of Chicago, Edmund J. James of the University of Illinois, and David Starr Jordan of Stanford University. Influenced by a plan at the University of Georgia to reinforce the academic needs of some of its young men, Harper speculated that a separation between the junior years of a college education from the senior years better served both groups of students. He believed that the work of the freshman and sophomore years was only a confirmation of the academy or high school work. He also believed that true university level work began after the sophomore year; most young men attending the first two years of college were not academically prepared to exercise in the rigors of research. He separated instruction at his own institution, the University of Chicago, to follow his theory. Because he sincerely believed that high schools should include the first two years of college education, his efforts to convince Chicago public school educators to offer these courses initiated the country's first independent public junior college, Joliet Junior College. Harper offered the Joliet students placement at the University of Chicago; perhaps the first articulation agreement between a two and four-year institution.

John W. Burgess of Columbia University "called upon the American public to add two or three years of education to the high school or academy curriculum"(Denier 38). This division would allow students to fully partake of the rigorous academic research available at the university level. In addition, Alexis Lange, of the University of California, firmly stated that the two-year college be part of the secondary school system and not part of higher education in America. Lange envisioned the junior college as the "apex" of the high school program by providing an academic education and a vocational education to those who completed the program. Those who wished to continue to the university level could, but the junior colleges, as Lange saw them, served the middle ground. Students interested in vocational or professional training could complete a program within two years and be prepared for employment in the business world.

Lange presented one very important suggestion to the junior colleges, one which encourages the community college of today: "It is an essential part of the junior-college idea that each junior college have its own individuality, in accordance with its environment"(quoted in Diener 72). He also doubted the validity of junior colleges that only served as the first two years of a university education. For Lange, vocational and professional education confirmed the uniqueness of a junior college education. Therefore, community college students had several

options: transfer to a four-year college or university, earn a terminal degree, or fulfill the requirements for a specific job.

Lange worried about how the two-year schools needed to be "protected against some of its friends, notably the university"(Diener 73). He understood the chauvinistic attitude of university administrators to protect their domains educationally and economically. He perceived the establishment of an attitude which persists today. The creators of the "the junior college movement...main preoccupation was not with the junior college; it was with...the elite research university"(Brint and Karabel 81).

In 1925, the Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools of the Southern States attempted to define and refine the nature of the junior college. To this association, the junior college was clearly an academic institution at the college level, not the high school level. It set levels of standards for entrance requirements, which included a successful completion of a high school program. It determined the requirements for graduation, the denial of conferring a degree, the number of college departments which were academic rather than vocational, the training of the faculty, the working library, the instructional laboratories, and the development of extra-curricular activities. After reviewing this document, it is evident that SACS viewed the junior college strictly as the first two years of a

university education, not as an institution which would stand independently in the higher educational system.

In his text, *Profile of the Community College: A Handbook,* Charles Monroe reminds his readers that during the early years of American higher education only students from upper-class society attended colleges and universities. Even the population base for the high school student body was low, only 10% of the youths at the beginning of the twentieth century attended secondary schools. The arrival of state universities and land-grant colleges helped democratize the American educational system. Monroe professes that the development of community colleges democratized the educational landscape even further. The tuition at these schools was less expensive than four-year colleges. In addition, these two-year schools were closer to the students' homes, thus avoiding the costs of room and board, or transportation.

The conclusion of World War II and President Harry Truman's efforts played important roles in the modern establishment of the community college. G.I. benefits and Truman's recognition of the significance of the community college increased the two-year college's stature in higher education. The benefits offered to military men after the war "provided a ladder of upward mobility" to many who never had the opportunity to attend any form of higher education(Brint and Karabel 12). Schools were created across the country to accommodate this

growing population of college bound students. Cohen and Brawer illustrate the concerns of many who thought the schools grew without concrete plans, directions, or authority. Several state universities organized community colleges as feeder schools to their own larger universities.

This emerging student population and the economic conditions of the times caused President Harry Truman to develop an interest in higher education. The commission Truman assembled fully appreciated the contribution of the community college to higher education. The U.S. President's Commission on Higher Education (1947) spoke directly to the contributions and needs of the community college. The report encouraged an emphasis on terminal education as well as transferable credits. The community college directed its services to the people of the community which it serves. The horizons of the community college were only limited by its "vision...energy...and ingenuity"(quoted in Diener 134). The only obvious limit was the college budget. However, the Commission reminded its audience that the schools must be carefully planned with a sense of authority and a sense of economic restraints. In 1950, Truman encouraged federal assistance to community colleges. He called the creation of community colleges "an important educational development...taken through trial, adaptation, and democratic experimentation"(quoted in Diener 130).

The democratic experiment expanded in the 1960's exponentially. Community colleges grew in budgets, staff and students. As a result in 1970, the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education published a special report with recommendations for the two-year institutions. The Commission recognized the community college as a "comprehensive public two-year college which offers academic, general, occupational, remedial, and continuing adult education"(11). The commission also acknowledged that community colleges had a commitment to equal opportunity, and with this commitment, the community college faces a heavy burden.

This prestigious commission offered many suggestions and goals for two-year colleges. One goal that the commission proposed was open enrollment to high school graduates or to those adults 18 years of age or older. This policy encouraged the community college to meet the needs of a diverse population for vocational, academic, and technical programs. The commission also recommended meeting the multiple educational needs for transfer or career opportunities, and for those who fulfill the requirements, the college should offer an A.A. or A.S. degree. These degrees were to prove to employers and business leaders that the students were goal oriented and able to complete a formal program.

Academic programs should be two-fold, the Commission stated. The community college needed to work together with four-year institutions so that

qualified students could transfer. Furthermore, the community college must offer remedial education to support those students who wanted to succeed but needed their basic academic skills reinforced. All of these goals have become part of the two-year college program; however, the community college effort is constantly evolving.

Although the history of the community college indicates that it primarily served students interested in academic programs, the institution has broadened its educational offerings to serve the needs of students, community, and business. Academic programs are still an essential element of the community college, yet they are now only a portion of the educational responsibilities at the two-year schools. These schools also provide general education programs and liberal arts programs. Career education is a part of general education and an A.A. or A.S. degree is awarded as per the Carnegie Commission's recommendation. On the other hand, students in a liberal arts program usually transfer to a four-year college or university. The liberal arts program in most community colleges are structured to coordinate with four-year schools. In addition to these roles, the college offers community education which includes adult education, remedial education, continuing education, community services, and community or business based programs. The function of the two-year schools has expanded since their

creation, and this expansion establishes the schools' dedication to embracing anyone interested in life-long learning.

Profile of Northern Virginia Community College

The history of Northern Virginia Community College is similar to other two-year institutions which developed during the boom years of community college education. In 1964, Northern Virginia Technical College began to serve students from the Alexandria/Arlington areas at its Bailey's Crossroads facility. Initial enrollment was 761 students with forty-six faculty and staff members. When state legislation changed the technical/occupational systems across Virginia into the community college systems, the addition of transfer curricula reshaped the mission of the schools.

In 1967, the Annandale Campus, the largest of the five campuses, opened on a seventy-eight acre site. More parcels of land were purchased at that time for campuses in Loudoun, Manassas, and Woodbridge. In 1969, a site was bought for the new Alexandria campus; meanwhile the Bailey's Crossroads building served as that city's community college campus during construction in 1973. School officials placed temporary offices on the three outer campuses for evening classes and administrative staff; other classes were held at accessible community locations – local high schools and recreation centers.

Dr. Richard J. Ernst, the current president of the entire Northern Virginia Community College, began his tenure in 1968. He has overseen the continual construction projects on each of the five campuses, the development of the Extended Learning Institute, and the tremendous increase in student population. In the 1995-96 fall and spring semesters, NOVA's Office of Institutional Research counted over 60,000 students attending the five campuses as either full or part-time students. This does not include the over 20,000 students who participated in non-credit community education programs. The school proudly states that 266,039 people partook of public service activities at all five campuses during the 94-95 fiscal year(catalog 13). These statistics demonstrate the college's dedication to investigating and to creating programs that touch thousands of Virginians yearly.

The State Board for Community Colleges acts as governing board for NOVA and all other community colleges in Virginia. The Governor appoints the members of the board. Local leadership performs the duties of the Northern Virginia Community College Board, and these men and women are appointed by their local political jurisdictions. Business and community leaders also serve on the curriculum advisory committees, especially for occupational and technical course work. Their advice is also sought when the school develops new programs and courses which may interest potential college students.

As with most community colleges, Northern Virginia Community College has formulated a mission and goals statement which emphasizes opportunity and responsiveness to its students. Simply stated in the catalog, the mission is, "Northern Virginia Community College believes that education is the cornerstone of a free society"(catalog 14). The goals recognize the changing needs of its community and the educational process, and they dedicate the school to enhancing the "values, skills and knowledge" of all of its students(catalog 14). The school believes in providing programs and courses for degree status, certificate status, business training, and developmental education. It continues its efforts to serve the occupational or technical student with comprehensive programs which are responsive to the needs of these fields. The school offers various instructional methods, materials, and support services to accommodate the multiple educational needs of its students. Similar to the goals of four-year colleges and the universities, the school strives to create an open and supportive educational environment which is inclusive in its effort to encourage every student to succeed in their efforts – academic, professional, or personal. Finally, the school continually cultivates a partnership with the community to enhance the economic, cultural, and educational needs of its citizenry.

Open access, a controversial topic at many state colleges and universities, is the cornerstone of NOVA's "Statement of Values." Programs, courses, and

services are established to underscore a commitment to students who may have not had the opportunity to participate in post-secondary education. While proposing new and diverse learning techniques, the school stands grounded in its desire to respect the dignity and worth of each individual. Therefore, high school graduates, students who have completed a Graduate Equivalency Diploma, students who have completed an approved developmental program, or students who have demonstrated qualification for admission are all welcome to participate in the curriculum of NOVA.

This last phrase emphasizes the true meaning of "open access." Admission to the school's programs is available to adults at least 18 years of age and able to benefit from enrollment. Potential students take placement examinations which help the student and his counselor develop a plan of study. Critics have argued, as demonstrated later in this paper, that open access interferes with the academic standing of an institution of higher learning. The school's stature is compromised by its earnest efforts to include a broad population in the academic conversation.

NOVA's stature is enhanced by its diverse student population. Along with native Virginians, the school's student population includes pupils from neighboring states and over eighty-five countries across the globe. More than seven thousand international students attended classes at NOVA's five campuses, and 2,931 attended classes at the Alexandria campus in 1995(Fact Book 64). Teachers

have even found students from warring countries – North Korea/South Korea, Iran/Iraq – sitting next to each other in the classroom.

This diversity is enhanced by other student population factors. The median age for a student registered in fall 1995, was 26.5, and the mean age was 29.4. Females are the majority school wide: 20,785 or 54.6% of the population. Minority enrollment – African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, and Native Americans – increased from 24% in 1990 to 35% in fall 1995(NOVA Fact Book 7-11). Often, senior citizens take advantage of the Virginia Senior Citizens Higher Education Act of 1974 and enroll in courses for credit without charge on a space available basis. Of all of these students, a part-time academic career is preferred to a full-time academic schedule. Seventy-five percent of the students attend classes on a part-time schedule, and the majority attend classes during the day(Fact Book 11). These statistics coordinate with community colleges in general, and they punctuate the major statistical differences between two and four-year institutions.

NOVA confers two-year associate degrees, one-year certificates, and short career studies certificate in many areas. The occupational and technical education program fulfills the needs of students who plan to enter para-professional careers in the fields of agriculture, business, engineering, health and medicine, and industry. The curricula is often planned to serve the needs of workers in the

school's regions. For example, the Annandale campus is the home to the college's eight health technologies programs, and the Alexandria campus offers the Early Childhood Development program.

The college transfer program concentrates on courses in the arts and sciences and preprofessional programs transferable to baccalaureate degree programs at state four-year institutions. The school coordinates with colleges and universities to assure that requirements by these two institutions are parallel. To assure a positive transfer experience, NOVA provides its students a transfer counseling service which advises the student on a university's particular requirements.

At NOVA, as at other community colleges nationwide, general education includes "the common knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed by each individual to be effective as a person...employee...consumer...citizen"(catalog 14). The course program takes its requirements from both the occupation and technical fields and the college transfer program. This avenue to higher education allows the student to either prepare for a particular career or possibly transfer to a four-year college. While trying to fulfill two areas of interest, careful coordination between student and counselor supports the student's academic needs.

Some students are not prepared for college level studies or the rigors of the occupational and technical programs. Therefore, the school provides a

developmental studies program so that the students can progress and become successful in their future academic careers. Counselors administer tests and investigate the student's skills in order to properly place students in developmental courses. Individualized programs and the Extended Learning Institute allow the students to work at their own pace, perhaps even complete the requirements ahead of schedule. Some of the college level courses offer "labs" for those students who do not need remedial help but are unable to perform on a strict academic timetable. For example, English composition can be taken in a "lab" which is actually twice the number of college hours per week as the traditional English composition class (6 vs. 3 credit hours per week).

NOVA serves its surrounding community by establishing a continuing education program which allows potential students to continue their learning process without degree or certificate requirements. The community education programs integrates the cultural and educational interests of the community on a non-credit basis. Many times area employment needs change, and the school assists the community by organizing classes in the skills and training objectives of the student and the employer. These are usually special programs which are short term in nature.

Most of these students pass through the doors of the composition classroom. Their transfer, certificate, and terminal programs normally demand English

composition as a requirement. Therefore, writing instructors face the challenge to incorporate the variety of educational interests of their students when planning their semester's syllabus.

In the Community College Classroom: "Professor" and Student

Pedagogy is the primary professional interest to the community college professor. The two-year schools are principally known as teaching institutions, not research institutions. Generally, professors are required to teach fifteen hours per week, to offer convenient office hours for their students, and to serve on committees which respond to the needs of the community college student. In the community college good teaching is rewarded and applauded by faculty and administrators.

Within my journal entries, I noticed a persistent interest in how to teach certain areas of composition. Often, I referred to how a particular teaching technique did – or did not – work. When preparing lesson plans, I reviewed texts and essays which focused on instructional suggestions. For example, *TETYC* offers a section identified as, "What Works For Me." Individual community college instructors from around the country share their assignments and how to teach them. Thomas Newkirk's *Nuts & Bolts: A Practical Guide to Teaching College Composition* provides several chapters on how to review grammar rules with the class. I implemented suggestions from two or three of the chapters and found the recommendations helpful.

After studying Kenneth Bruffee's work on collaborative learning, I decided to include several collaborative projects within my own syllabus. The "Inquiry Research Project" is a direct result of this investigation. As noted in the journals, some semesters the groups worked well together. Sometimes the students responded to the project as Bruffee predicted. They were concerned about their grades, or they were worried about a weaker student's ability to complete the project. Later, I found a *Calvin and Hobbs* cartoon which corresponds with these issues, and I began to distribute the cartoon with each assignment sheet.

What Makes An Effective Teacher

While studying in Dr. Richard Gossweiler's class, "Community College Teaching and Course Development," I discovered many significant points about teaching in general and teaching at the community college level in particular. In my final journal, Spring Semester 1996, I refer to his class because I felt defeated by my class' performance. What had worked in the past did not work that semester. His suggestions for further research enabled me to accept the few successes and many failures of that semester. I learned that teaching is a passion; it requires high energy, flexibility, knowledge in a field, and often a sense of humor.

Diversity in the community college classroom means more than multiculturalism; it also encompasses the issues of gender, age, and educability. The two-year schools have been encountering these issues for many years. Since its inception, the community college has created ways and means to reach out to potential students and learners across the country. As a result, they have displayed the necessary flexibility to serve each individual learner. However, critics have declared that the community colleges had "to break from conventional university conceptions of curriculum and instruction, and find unconventional, nontraditional ways to work with nontraditional students"(McGrath and Spear 22). The schools attempt to serve their students by implementing pedagogical techniques not often found in the four-year college or university classroom.

The nontraditional student's profile differs from the traditional college student's in various ways. The traditional college student is perceived to be eighteen to twenty-two years of age, to have graduated from high school and to have passed the required examinations for entrance into a four-year institution of higher learning. The nontraditional college student may be older, or younger, or a minority, or perhaps a student who has not succeeded in high school or a prior college. He has "not been similarly shaped by an academic and literary culture, and so from the perspective of that culture...[he is] sure to look deficient" (McGrath and Spear 94). Therefore, he seems inadequate to handle the demands

of a higher education. Through the years, community college educators recognized this perspective and created programs which respond to the needs of the nontraditional student. Despite comments to the contrary, they have continually strived to make learning "inviting and engaging"(McGrath and Spear 95).

Community colleges invite students to "progress as far as their motivation and ability will sustain them"(Knoell 21). Educators probe various pedagogical theories and studies to present material to their students and to develop methods which cultivate the students as learners. In his early text, *Professors as Teachers,* Kenneth Eble, who once taught English at the University of Utah, recommends several methods of teaching to professors in four-year colleges and universities as well as in the community college. His respect for the student's evaluation of a professor's performance bears investigation. A student's attitude toward his professor often reflects the professor's attitudes towards teaching. Eble states that "students were most upset by teachers who did not care...*Caring* is a word, like *relevance,* which has been so frequently used by students that it has aroused distrust among faculty members"(22). In his study, students on both small campuses and large campuses comment on teachers "caring" about their students' academic performance. Past attitudes about the objectivity of scholarship, avoiding the personal and subjective elements, and maintaining the aura of authority often present professors as not caring. University students feel that they

are interfering with the professor's true love, research. Eble reports that teaching is not a subject of great interest to many of these faculty members.

Eble reminds his readers that in four-year institutions, research is privileged: "The heart of the system is a belief that teaching is inferior to working with, contributing to, and pursuing knowledge"(28). The pressure to publish is evident on most campuses, the pursuit of effective teaching is not. Therefore, "teaching is...a competitive activity"(Eble 33). The institution often dismisses it, the students often resist it, and the professors often avoid it.

A commitment to the craft of teaching is a strong beginning for effective teaching; however, much more is needed, says Eble. He offers several suggestions for those interested in college teaching. He encourages the professor to avoid rigidity, ambiguity, and monotony. Moreover, he asserts that the same pedagogical techniques do not work with every class, every hour, every time. Eble espouses a "generosity of spirit," – the giving of oneself – "energy, time, skill, and knowledge" is necessary for effective teaching(38).

Although "energy is often an outstanding characteristic of the effective teacher," Eble refers to both physical and mental energy. Meaningful gestures, control, and performance are all interpreted by the students who are often the audience in the classroom setting. In both the community college classroom and the university classroom, students can sense a professor's enthusiasm. Eble

believes that caring for the subject matter is important and demonstrating that care is even more important(47). Professors "lose" students when the educator behaves in an arrogant, aloof, impersonal manner. The subject may be important, but if the professor demonstrates her authority by oppressive behavior, the knowledge is not *shared*, it is *endowed*. Students know the difference.

Eble reminds teachers that "variety is another central attribute of effective teaching"(43). Various examples and illustrations allow students who have different learning styles to fully participate in the educational experience. Breaking up the class time into smaller segments, creating peer groups, assigning work to collaborative groups, and presenting material in diverse formats are all ways to establish variety in the classroom. More importantly, these techniques also disperse authority in the classroom, thus making learning a shared process.

Furthermore, Eble respects the students' demand for honesty from their professors. He contends that "teaching places an extraordinary demand on being believed in"(51). Faking a lecture, avoiding students, and grading carelessly are all areas when professors demonstrate their honesty and dishonesty in more concrete areas of teaching. Yet, honesty means so much more. Displaying respect for students' cultures, genders, ages, and abilities underscore a professor's honesty. Critic after critic in the various fields of teaching composition theory have been vociferous on this issue.

Eble devotes a large part of his text to evaluating teachers. He admits that examining the teaching performance of professors is a much more subjective task than evaluating research/publication performance. Because of this subjectivity, the community college professor suffers the lack of respect often given to performance in the classroom. Stepping into another's domain to scrutinize teaching ability leads to all types of problems. Yet, teachers must be held accountable for their work within the classroom as well as their work outside of the classroom, and if this work is respected within the academy, the efforts of the community college educator gains validity.

Eble places high regard for student participation in the evaluation process, and this might strike fear in the heart of most professors. Eble accepts the student as a mature, reliable source of information and believes that careful creation and study of student evaluations can lead to a successful evaluation process. Department chairs do share in this process and can encourage their faculty to "review and [to formulate] the criteria and procedures for promotion and tenure"(65). Cooperation among department chairs, faculty, and students enhances the evaluation process for all involved. An equitable, straightforward evaluation of educators distributes the power among all who participate in the classroom and validates the authority of teaching.

Many of these recommendations from Eble were responsible for some of the changes I incorporated within my own teaching techniques. Naturally, I want to say to myself that my journals demonstrate an adherence to Eble's philosophy, but many times the entries do not indicate an honest response to a student or his work. My indirect responses to – and frustrations with – Janeth in the Fall 1995 journal prove this. A more direct statement about her performance would have been more honest. My ambiguous policy on absences is evident in each journal. Some students were absent for several classes, and I did little to rectify the problem. Since reading Eble and attending Gossweiler's course, I formulated a more coherent policy, and the students have responded by attending class on a more consistent basis.

Community College "Professors"

Kenneth Eble's work speaks to all educators who teach in the college classroom. However, the community college faculty member has particular problems, and these problems are often a result of the community college's ambiguous history. The two-year college remains on the periphery of the American educational system. It is not considered a part of the secondary school programs in individual states, nor is it considered a full member of the states' higher educational programs. Therefore, its instructors remain in "academic

limbo." McGrath and Spear indicate that most community college instructors do refer to themselves as "teachers." Although those with a doctorate are "strongly distinguished from their colleagues, [b]oth groups describe themselves as professional teachers or educators, and strongly disavow the university professor's strong identification with scholarship"(139). The two critics argue that community college teachers label university educators as elitists, or not student centered(140). Conversely, the university educator labels the community college educator as "pedestrian," not of university caliber. Name calling will not help either educator.

Since its inception, the "importance of good teaching has been emphasized" in most community colleges' goals or mission statements(Cohen and Brawer 148). These schools were conceived to be teaching institutions by their creators Harper, Lange, and Barnard. These men viewed the two-year schools as educational institutions which nurture the younger college students, while leaving the more challenging work to the university level. By the time the students reached the university level, they would be mature enough to handle the academic rigors of their fields of study. Cohen and Brawer acknowledge the early advocates of the two-year schools who demanded that the schools become "a teaching institution *par excellence*"(Eells quoted in Cohen and Brawer 148).

Smaller classes, professors dedicated to teaching, not scholarship, and institutional organization contribute to the student centered mission of the

community college. At the state university, the number of students in a freshman or sophomore level course can run into the hundreds. Often, fifty or sixty students attend lectures presented by the professor, and then they attend group discussions conducted by a graduate student. In composition classes across the country, the "professor" is often a graduate student earning a masters or doctorate degree in English. Many of these graduate student-educators have little teaching experience, and sometimes they are left on their own without professional support or oversight. Elizabeth Rankin despairingly describes her graduate student-educators as "a dysfunctional family, competing for authority...going silent, refusing the tasks" when she left them for a trip out of town. Certainly, with her guidance, these teaching assistants did learn how to function as teachers in the composition classroom, but it takes almost an entire semester to get them into shape. Most composition students don't have time for this maturing process on their educator's part.

This does not happen at the community college level; professors teach their courses without assistants. The students are encouraged to communicate with their professor directly, not through a gatekeeper. This allows professors to be more responsive and to be able to make choices about methods and materials suited for an individual class. They practice their teaching skills daily; department chairs and fellow faculty members evaluate performance. The goal of the

community college is to place the student's experience of learning in front of the teacher, not at a distance. This placement allows the instructor to understand the rhythms or tensions of the learning environment. Instruction is not simply "an activity that implements the curriculum"; nor is it simply "a set of activities (lecturing, conducting discussions, cajoling, and so on)"(Cohen and Brawer 161). Teaching is a craft which incorporates the mandates Eble espouses in his texts.

Community college teachers originally came from the ranks of high school teachers across the country. They continued to enhance their teaching skills to serve a new, distinctive type of student. Now, various universities offer programs specifically aimed at the community college educator. They encourage educators with a Master's degree in their field of study to expand their knowledge base to the pedagogical techniques needed for the diverse population of the community college. East Carolina University and Michigan State University offer a Master's degree for students interested in teaching English in the two-year college. Idaho State University and the University of Michigan offer a Doctor of Arts degree in English to students who want to extend their training(Kroll 202). The National Center for Community College Education at George Mason University offers its students a unique program which responds to the demands of the discipline and the challenges of the community college classroom. Students at this university must complete a required number of courses in their individual fields of study and

complete a required number of courses in the history, mission, and leadership of the community college. Therefore, the student advances her knowledge in a particular subject and learns to apply that knowledge to the unique environment of the two-year school.

Critics, including myself, chastise the community college educator for not participating more fully in scholarship pertinent to her field. Responding to the academic needs and learning styles of their students, the two-year school's professor fails to articulate this response in the form of academic theory. George B. Vaughan, one of the founders of the National Center for Community College education at George Mason University, proclaims in his essay "Scholarship and Teaching: Crafting the Art" that educators in the community college system add value and strength to their pedagogical commitments by participating in academic scholarship.

When educators declare themselves as dedicated participants in institutions committed to teaching, they are making a reasonable statement for community college. Yet, by ignoring their potential contributions to their respective fields, they do not do their students service. Vaughan believes that "the most important reason for community college faculty members to engage in scholarship is to improve their teaching...[and] to improve the image of the community college among members of the higher-educational community"(213). Community college

educators have valuable experiences, insights, and suggestions pertinent to all teachers in higher education. By investigating and formulating theory in either pedagogy or their own individual field of study, the professor reaffirms her dedication to teaching.

The Two-Year College Student

My journals reveal a student body at NOVA which is similar to that of other community colleges in a large urban area. The students who attended my classes came from such diverse backgrounds as men and women retired from the military, or youths who served as mediators during gang confrontations. Several of my students attended four-year colleges and did not do well academically. Jason, Christina, and Ian are members of this last group. At first, they felt tentative about trying academic work again. As the semesters progressed, they developed a confidence that spurred them on to continue their studies.

One particular group with which I felt a kinship was the women who had families and attended classes. I, too, was once a part of this group in my undergraduate studies. As I reviewed my journals, I noticed an affection for their efforts and a celebration of their successes. During the Spring 1995 semester, Rose and I found solace and sympathy in our after class conferences or phone conversations.

She had teenage daughters and so did I; we often talked about the stress of dividing our attention between our studies and our families.

These students, and others, may be found in four-year schools, but probably not in the great numbers found in two-year schools. Community college students are perceived as "different," not able to succeed at the university level. This is a perception accepted by many educators who know little about the community college. Their opinions marginalize the two-year college student even further. Despite the cynical assumptions, these two-year schools have encouraged the Jasons, the Roses, the Christinas to try higher education one more time – or even several more times. The schools have welcomed students who want to attend just one class or who want to complete a certificate program. Critics argue about the validity of the community college's admissions policy. Some of the critics are discussed below, and their opinions are worth scrutinizing when discussing the marginalization of the community college student.

Open Access

Over the past several years, one major area of concern has affected the performance of community colleges and their mission. This issue is access, an essential, yet controversial aspect of the schools. The community college is a neighborhood institution; it needs to respond to the citizens it serves. Over time,

access was expanded to include a diverse population, thus contributing to opening up post-secondary education to those who may never even try to attend college. Most schools have an "open door" policy: those who are at least 18 years of age, have a high school diploma or GED may attend. In addition, students who are 18 but not high school graduates may attend if they demonstrate the ability to benefit from the college experience. This last statement is quite broad and certainly open to much discussion. Many educators strongly believe that the schools should retain their open status. As a result, remedial education has become an integral part of the community college system. Yet, schools must decide how to develop and to sustain quality educational programs for the entire community.

Dale Parnell addresses the issue of access in two of his texts reviewing higher education in America. In his book, *Dateline 2000: The New Higher Education Agenda*, this educator acknowledges that the community college faces a "major challenge for the 1990's" which is the "twin problems of a surplus of disadvantaged individuals and a shortage of skilled workers"(103). The members of this at-risk population have moved to large urban areas from rural or suburban sections of the country. Teenagers grow up in an environment which displays a "lack of hope and few positive life options"(104). A heavy burden is placed on secondary schools to educate these students both academically and socially. In

addition, many members of the at-risk population are of minority origins – African American and Hispanic – and have not earned high school degrees. Therefore, American society must face the dilemma of the various levels of adult literacy.

Furthermore, Parnell believes that the community college can address many of these problems and fill in the educational gaps between high school and college, and serve those students without a high school degree or traditionally accepted academic ability. Moreover, the community college needs to prepare students for gainful employment, not only for their own personal satisfaction, but for the needs of the entire society. Parnell encourages support from the entire community – local, state, and federal. They too will benefit from a student who attends and completes a community college program.

In another text, *The Neglected Majority*, Parnell asserts that "it is absolutely imperative that high schools and colleges, particularly community, technical, and junior colleges, become aggressive in examining, developing, and sustaining quality education programs to serve that great host of Americans who will keep this country working"(xxi). Here, Parnell shuns the notion that a student is successful only if he graduates from a four-year college or university with a baccalaureate degree. He states that this is an "unrealistic" image of educational excellence which ignores the vast majority of American students.

As a result, Parnell cites that the community college should pursue a different definition of excellence, one that seeks "the development of a highly diverse potential in all students"(10). He acknowledges that there "are many kinds of talents and many kinds of excellence," and the most significant aspect of education should encourage progress(8). This progress can be achieved through community, technical, or junior colleges which offer to the "ordinary" student post-secondary education and training. Parnell agrees with former Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, John J. Gardner, that American society is complex and depends on the capacity of "its people at every level to read and write, to make judgments, and to act in the light of extensive information"(8). A diverse academic and technical menu for community college students would serve them and the country's labor forces well. He asserts that a worker – the ordinary middle level person – deserves a broad education.

Edmund Gleazer agrees that the one access issue that community colleges must deal with is their new and diverse student bodies which caused many adjustments and innovations. In *The Community College: Values Vision & Vitality,* Gleazer connects the issues of community college education to economic issues, specifically employment. Like Parnell, Gleazer emphasizes that an employed individual serves himself and society. This broadens the responsibilities of the community college. The schools serve as a "middle man" in both the

academic and economic worlds. In these terms Gleazer uses a very apt word when discussing those who attend community college – "learner." He states that the term learner "carries the spirit that anyone who wants to learn is invited, and that instructional emphasis is learner-centered"(10).

Gleazer challenges the two-year institutions to place the accent on "community" in the term, community college. He suggests fashioning an educational program responsive to the community's needs, with school and community working together. He applauds Michigan's attempt to increase community awareness and response to the "needs of those persons residing in the college service area"(9). Of course, the questions of how much response and how much awareness arise from this opinion.

Yet, the community college does extend opportunities to a diverse population. It is an "institution that invites those needing a second chance, and which gives priority to those of limited educational options"(Gleazer 8). Community colleges proudly retain the perception of an academic "safety net" which stimulates learning and releases human potential. Gleazer believes that there is a value in "having a learning environment of people of different generations, ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic characteristics"(9). This is certainly a significant point which community colleges should emphasize in their recruitment and advertising. The college is a microcosm of the "real world."

In a text which reveals a skeptical view of the mission of the community college, Kevin J. Dougherty of Manhattan College maintains that few Americans have a true understanding of the two-year institution. They stereotype the students as misfits who cannot function in the four-year institution. The schools are "a catch basin for those few students unable or unwilling to enter 'regular' colleges"(3). Dougherty asserts that the schools play a "key role" in higher education by opening their doors to nontraditional students and by offering these students a variety of educational opportunities.

According to Dougherty, "35.8% of all college students, and 44.3% of all college freshmen" attended American community colleges in 1989(3). These numbers certainly demonstrate the two-year schools' value by extending higher education to a broad citizenry. In addition, the "open door" policy – a policy many four-year public institutions have adopted – allows for a much more diverse population not often viewed in the university setting.

Yet, Dougherty wonders if this student population is appropriately served. He discusses issues based on Marxists' sociological views that many of the students in community colleges are denied full entry into the economic system. Businesses, government officials, and foundations have forced the students into vocational programs, thus denying them access to furthering their education at four-year colleges. These members of the dominant class sit on advisory boards

and steer the community college towards their own specific goals, rather than the goals of the individual student(31). This type of activity promotes the oppression of the underclass, preventing them from furthering themselves economically and educationally.

Dougherty identifies "functionalists" as those advocates of the community college who view the institution as a servant who provides students, parents, and businesses with "training for...'middle-level' or 'semi-professional' occupations"(30). Throughout his text, *The Contradictory College*, Dougherty argues the validity of these different opinions about the schools. However, the premise of this text is that the vast majority of students who attend community college want to transfer to four-year institutions. This is not completely true.

The median age of the student population of the community college is twenty-nine, with the mode remaining at nineteen(Cohen and Brawer 32). Some of these students attend after dropping out of four-year colleges. Some of these students are in their sixties and seventies and attend school for personal fulfillment. Some of these students are graduates of four-year colleges who return to school to learn a business skill. Some of these students are studying to earn associates degrees in nursing, television technology, viticulture, and winery technology. In addition, the schools open their doors to those who may have never considered participating in higher education or who have been historically

barred from higher education: women, high school "drop outs," and ethnic minorities. Cohen and Brawer call for "the redefinition of the term *student*" because "the universe of community and junior college is fluid" enough to respond to this definition(35). Student learners of all ages, cultural heritages, and academic backgrounds are included in the distinctive educational endeavor called community college.

Appropriately, Cohen and Brawer ask, "Which people benefit most from, and which are harmed by, an institution that allows all to attend at their pleasure?"(64). Marlene Griffith and Ann Connor would respond that all students benefit from attending the two-year college. They call the community college, *Democracy's Open Door*. These two educators who actually teach in community colleges – unlike Dougherty – praise the schools for their open door policy. They use examples from their own student populations to demonstrate that the schools are used in creative ways by many of its students. They firmly believe in the continuance of the flexible nature of the two-year schools which respond to all members of the community. In their plea to make the community college more visible – for its survival in the higher education system – they emphasize that the schools serve the invisible, marginalized student who "zigzags" through their college and professional careers. Griffith and Connor insist that access be given to those who attend college courses sporadically as well as to those who finish a

degree or certificate program. Their experiences reflect that many community college students return over a number of years to build on their knowledge or enhance their professional standing.

Griffith, in a separate article, "Getting Our Story Out," continues her vigorous commitment to the mission of the community college. She worries that "the people who define [the community college and its students] are not the people who know" them(270). Therefore, many members of educational, business, and governmental communities "belittle the community college student and community college education"(270). Griffith continues her essay by recounting how the media and especially television offer "demeaning and discouraging" portrayals of the two-year schools. They are often depicted as "losers" and "unglamorous"(271). These portrayals may be a direct result of the history of the community college because the university creators of the two-year schools wanted their own institutions to focus exclusively on higher scholarship.

Community colleges gladly offer a place in the classroom to the "unglamorous" members of our society . They come into the classroom to retrain for positions in business and industry. They come from welfare lines to learn the skills necessary for their first job. They transfer to many of the best colleges and universities in the United States. And, like Dr. Victor Villanueva, Jr., they begin

the long difficult path to becoming a respected professor and composition specialist.

Two-year schools continue to educate and re-educate their constituency. For example, Guilford Technical Community College has earned respect and enthusiasm from multiple sources for its response to the educational needs of people who want to participate in the new array of jobs available across the state of North Carolina. These students learn semi-professional job skills along with "broadening their outlook through liberal arts" courses(Bleakley A1). Community colleges often offer their students business skills many four-year schools do not. The student population of GTCC reflects the national profile of community college students, "at least 25 [years old], and about a sixth of them already have bachelor's or master's degrees(Bleakley A1).

According to *The Wall Street Journal*, "600 recent graduates" of GTCC "had a starting salary of more than $35,000, 20% began at 25,000 to $30,000, and only 13% were earning less than $10,000"(Bleakley A1). In addition "hourly wages of 2,600 of the state's community college graduates rose an inflation-adjusted 9% to 17% in the four years after leaving school," and students not pursuing a degree also improved economically(Bleakley A1). However, the article does not address the earnings of those workers who did not have any college

education. It does state that an economic "ripple effect" was felt by the entire community(Bleakley A12).

These numbers are impressive; however, they are a result of a close alliance with businesses in the school's area. This can lead to a very difficult situation for the schools and its students. Are students being served by the schools or are the businesses? If the schools are dedicated to strictly serving their business allies, are they denying their students' potential in other areas of education, for example the arts? These are questions which have continually plagued all community colleges, their faculty, and their students.

Despite the problems, even our current president, Bill Clinton, recognizes the unique mission of community colleges and supports their efforts. His goals to help the two-year school's students financially demonstrates his commitment. "These places are, as the president hints, the sole upward route for more and more students"('Other' Colleges C6). Clinton contends that the community college "'is the institution in America which most clearly reflects how we ought to be organized, how we ought to work together, and what we ought to be trying to do as we move American into the 21st century'"('Other' Colleges C6).

The students outlined in this chapter and in my journals are the students who populate the composition classrooms of the community college. They are much more diverse than their counterparts in the four-year university. They are

different, not in the hierarchical sense of "deficient, deformed, or secondary," but in the straightforward sense of heterogeneous, consequential, and determined(Brunette and Wills 7). Marginalizing community college composition students ignores the beneficial information and knowledge potentially available to the entire spectrum of composition theory. The differences between two and four-year colleges demands exploration and discussion. One population can – and must – learn from the other. As a result, a more vigorous discourse which includes all students will emerge.

Journal #1
Spring 1995

January 11

Preparing Spring Syllabus

This is always a daunting procedure, What to keep? What to eliminate?

I'm switching from three days a week (50min.) classes to two days a week (1-1/2hr) classes. Incorporating work into this schedule was not too difficult, fall semester has too many holidays interfering with the schedule.

Last semester, I know I did not leave enough time to review the argument section of the syllabus. An argument paper is required at the Alexandria campus of NOVA. I hope I prepared my students properly. Over the past few years I dedicated more time to this segment, the results were mixed. Last semester, I had the most diversified group of students yet...now I'm not sure I served them well when we did the argument project.

This coming semester, I am devoting/planning more time to this segment. I've discussed a new Inquiry Project with a fellow student from GMU (Erin Brick), and we fine tuned it for a midterm project with possible expansion into the argument segment. The Inquiry Project will require research, writing, editing, and presenting answers to a series of questions on a particular current issue.

I am incorporating my Goals Sheet project into this semester's work; I agree with Mina Shaughnessy that this puts control into the hands of the students and gives them power over their own writing, editing process. They can take ownership of their own writing.

I've enjoyed the benefits of group workshops in the classroom and plan to incorporate this pedagogy into the program as much as possible. The Inquiry Project will be a group effort. I'm still a strong believer in writing as a process...I want to include collaboration into this process.

January 17

The first class – I arrived early to find my room assignment and to xerox my syllabus. The machine was "cold," and many of us were impatient to do our copying. Finally, the machine worked and all was saved.

Once again a diverse group of student, and a full classroom. Twenty-four students to begin with. How many will stay?

We thoroughly reviewed the syllabus. Students filled out index cards: name, address, phone number, did they have English 111 before, what type of papers have they written for school. I then asked them to write down how many languages/dialects they spoke. Students wrote down their answers after which we spoke about the dynamics of language: how we use it in different situations, and

how many languages they truly do speak. Students were interested in this discussion, mainly because they have not given respect to their private language as well as their public language.

This class appears to have a full range of students, women returning to school, high school graduates, young adults who are working. Many students are from diverse backgrounds. For example, we talked about languages and dialects, and we discovered that they speak variations of Arabic and African languages, Vietnamese, as well as the traditional French and Spanish. I am impressed with their languages skills outside of their native tongue.

However, I did discuss the dynamics of language. How we speak differently to different people: with parents, with friends, at work, at clubs, at school. They began to understand these aspects of language, and we agreed it is not often understood as elastic. This was a good introduction to the journal sheet for the semester: Perspectives of Language.

The cut-up project/group work went well. They answered the puzzle very well. Good way to start out, the students get to know each other early.

January 19

Today we discussed the issue of correct grammar for academic writing. We used index cards for each student to review and explain to the class one

aspect of grammar. We discussed the power of language, especially in the academic/business world; the rules of grammar are similar to the rules of the road; Standard English vs. non-Standard English; and how we do not pay attention to grammar in our everyday language, while at other times we do.

We reviewed assignments in Part V of the grammar book and analyzed work on the board.

We talked about language again and reviewed the journal questions. I told the students to be aware of language uses and asked two students who they talked to yesterday. Samson gave a good answer about the difference between talking to his professors and his friends. Tony stated that he worked at a tuxedo rental store (perfect!). He offered that most of his clients are upper-middle class men; Tony agreed that he spoke differently to them than to his own friends, and we all discussed what type of person rents a tux. We also discussed the language of the workplace, i.e. cummerbund vs. vest, butterfly collar vs. traditional collar.

Because of registration dates, more students showed up. This causes a problem in covering material during an elongated registration process. For grammar, I handed out index cards for the next class because I hate what I did today, stand up front and talk most of the class time. But I'm trying, and I think it works – to make grammar more accessible. We talk in terms of formulas, i.e. math rule you "can take to the bank."

Students tend to enjoy this analysis of language usage. I will try to ask each day, "Who did you talk to yesterday?"

Special Note: In addition, to all of this activity, I received a disconcerting memo from a full-time faculty member today. A professor of behavioral psychology sent a memo to all of the professors of a particular student announcing that he had caught the student cheating in his class. (I'm not sure if this was a one-time event or several events.) He told the student, according to the memo, that either he would have her expelled from the college or notify each of her future teachers. She was to choose her punishment; she chose the latter.

I showed the memo to Ellen Raphaeli (head of the English department); she was also surprised by its content. She stated that she would be willing to talk to the professor and investigate the matter. She offered that it was her responsibility to do this. Because I felt awkward, I handed the memo over to her for further investigation.

I approach my students without preconceived notions. I feel that they have a tabula rosa in my classroom. Now that I know this fact about the student, I wonder if I will be completely fair in the future. I hope I will be. I found the language of the memo abrupt and inconsiderate of the receiver (me) as well as the student. As an adjunct, I also feel that I lack the power to confront the professor

who has been at the school for more than 25 years. Ellen stated that this activity was not standard procedure; I certainly hope not.

January 24

Several new students arrived as add-ons. In addition, I allowed a German student, Anja, to join our class even though it was "closed." She was intimidated by another professor's syllabus which included readings by Emerson (an author I consider rather dry).

We went over grammar, students who "drew" sections reviewed them in class.

We had name tags on desks so students can learn each other's name. I want to create a community of writers without their knowledge of names; this is difficult to achieve. Some scoffed about this procedure, but it worked. Educators/professors need to create community and naming is significant, especially as we divide into group work.

I have problems with late registration. I know this is a common element to community college education, but I have students who missed the first full week. We start material right away, and I fear that we will "lose" students early in the year because they need to play "catch up." They also miss the syllabus review and certain "rules of manners" I expect in my classroom.

Grammar material went well, yet do they understand? Are they afraid to ask questions? I constantly encourage them to do so, the index card exercise helps.

January 26

Reviewed phrases, clauses and all other material related to homework. Students appeared to understand the material...

We reviewed the David Cohen article which is a good taking point about the use of language and how some people define language. We talked about being critical readers/thinkers/writers. The article offers Cohen's definition of language plus his examples of how others use language.

Overloaded class, my class is way too big now (28 students); I realize that several students will drop out over the course of the semester. It is inevitable, and I can see that overwhelming fear in some student's eyes when discussing the grammar. I hope they can latch on to what we need to do. I fear for a large group of ESL students, I still feel that they are not fully prepared for college level writing, and I mean two-year college/university level work would be a serious reach for many students.

Late registration is a true problem. More students today (2 or 3) who have missed three class meetings, that's four and one half hours of class. That's a large

amount of work, including missing the introductory material. Somehow the community college system needs to address this situation.

January 31

Today was the grammar test.

The second registration list has arrived, and now I'm at 25 students, not a bad number. I think that the group work I plan will go well with this amount. They are starting to discover their "classroom voices," and I look forward to the next few weeks.

The student who was the subject of the "cheating" memo transferred out. I have not seen her since the first week and the one time since I received the memo; I hope that she didn't transfer because I received the memo. Did she think I was already prejudging her? Or was she clever enough to register, he sends out the memo, and then she transfers into all new classes without his knowing?

February 2

We reviewed mechanics, punctuation and capitalization. We will have a test/review of this material next Tuesday. This will be the final work on grammar

and mechanics. Students have found this review helpful since they have not been in school for a while.

We did a group paper workshop. The students passed their papers around for comments on editing. This writing assignment (#1) is a short, simple one, and I want students to become comfortable with sharing their papers with classmates. Some students wrote content comments on the papers.

We discussed the topics for the up-coming Inquiry Project and the difference between a research/expository work and an argument. Gary asked about having an opinion on the topics and should that be part of the Inquiry Project (IP). I told them I wanted them to be as objective as possible. If they want to investigate the material further and use it for the argument project, that would be fine.

They edited each other's papers. Native language students who reviewed foreign born students' papers realized the difficulty these student have writing in English. Variations of a particular word (i.e., noun vs. verb form) appear in papers and confuse the reader. Good experience for the students of both areas.

We talked about content briefly. Basically, did the student cover the topic fully? Does the reader need more information?

Most students took this work seriously. Because I mixed up the stack of papers, students met other classmates when they returned papers. Questions were

yelled: "Who is Jennifer?" Who is Yetti?" I want them to see each other as a part of the whole community of writers in our class.

February 7

Today we quickly reviewed mechanics, and then the students worked on the mechanics test. The test was quickly completed by some students; however, several took a full hour to work on it.

Many students seem to do their work diligently. They have completed assignments ahead of time, not unusual; I'm concerned that a division will develop in class between those who are conscientious and those who are not.

Also my class seems to be able to handle more work than I have assigned. I will try to beef-up my assignments. Are they too easy? I don't think so...but I am concerned. The IP may be a good challenge; I will concentrate on this.

We talked about my dissertation project and their goals sheet. They seem agreeable to the idea.

Grammar test grades were better than past classes who have taken the test. The students' grades were more in the B/C range than before. I was pleased with the results.

Special Note: I ran into a former student, Norma/fall 94, who told me she was transferring out of an honors English class because she did not find it

challenging enough. She said "It's not like your class. All we do is read. No writing, no journals, no discussions." flattery...flattery.

February 9

Today the class divided into groups and we discussed the first two parts in the *Bedford*. The questions were: How does the section apply to writers in general? How does the section speak to you as an individual writer? Excellent responses. First, the groups worked well as separate units. Their internal discussions were lively and on topic. Second, they offered thoughtful information to the class as a whole. We covered syntax, thesis, grammar, outlines vs. freewriting, introductions, all areas of concern. Finally, students offered each other advice on how to overcome individual problems.

We talked about audience, and I once again used the McDonald's ads on TV as an example. Received the usual responses of "I never realized that!" Magazines, their advertisers, and casinos, how they create themselves for particular audiences. We also talked about a *Washington Post* article about Marion Barry and his clothing. It changes for each of the various audiences he encounters.

Paper #1 was graded and handed back. Most students were disappointed with their grades, but we reviewed the papers in terms of our class/group discussions. Students seemed more aware of what they need to work on individually.

February 14

We first talked about the IP. We reviewed the format/topic sheet for students to think about which topic they would like to work on. The students appeared interested in the topics and the project as a whole. I reminded them that they will have time during each class to meet and to work as a group.

Parts III and IV of the text: We did this in group form again.

The students participate in groups well. They have a knack for picking out what is important and have the ability to relate it to their own writing. They're absorbing.

Jargon and slang, the differences between the two were hard for the students to grasp, but we finally worked it out. I am pleased about the students thinking about their own writing. They are working on their goal sheets. Many of them are thoughtful and purposeful. At the end of class, students signed up for their IP groups.

February 16

A slow start today and some what frustrating: many students (Ken, Duc, Brad, Gary, Astier, Tony, Roberto) did not do their drafts for paper #2. Ugh.

The students who did do their drafts spent time in peer review sessions, at least three people had to read, comment, sign their papers. They did so quietly, no real conversation, except Rose was intently helping Yetti with her paper. They were working on Yetti's syntax; it was a pleasure to see them working together. Others made comments and readily shared/passed papers around. They talked about content and edition.

The final reader was to complete two points: 1. describe the purpose (thesis) of the writer's work, and 2. complete the idea, "I would like to hear more about..." I will see these comments when they hand in the final paper and draft package on Tuesday.

Those who did not do drafts began them in class. They were told to write on their topics non-stop for thirty minutes. They did do this, but a few drafts were skimpy. Perhaps inspiration at 8am is hard to come by. We did review each topic in class and talked about how to approach the topic.

After these work sessions, I gave an administrative lecture, those with two absences need to be aware of possible failure, also get the phone number of a classmate for assignments, and call me. I'm willing to meet with them if they are

having a problem. I am concerned that a few students (Gary, Brad, Tony) are treating this like high school. Their maturity level may not be up to college work. I don't want their immaturity to affect class meetings negatively.

We announced groups for IP. I broke them up with maturity/writing skills in mind. Balance is an issue here. I hope I worked it out well.

February 21

Today the students met in topic groups, basically to do two things: 1. get to know each other, and 2. answer (in writing) "I chose this topic because..." They spoke to each other. The immigration group worries me because they are the most diverse group. They have had little experience in research/writing. But, we had our "library" tour today. That was helpful. So many of these students need the guidance, and basically they need to know where to go to receive help. Many students appeared bored, but I know they will need to know how to use the library for their work. For me or for someone else.

We are behind in the *Thinking in Writing* text. I'm not too worried but I need to catch up. Journal entries are terrific. I'm very excited by their work. I would like to keep their journals for my project. I wonder if I can ask...a thought for later.

Today, I also had a conference with a student who told me that she needed to have an abortion. It was difficult to talk with her. I told her that at this point, her personal life is her priority, and we discussed how she could reschedule her work load. I tried to be supportive. I think she appreciated this. I don't want to be judgmental. I told her to call me and let me know how I can help academically. Thankfully, she has confided in her mother who is helping her tremendously.

February 23

We began the *TW* text and talked about conversation/dialogue with the writer. Did the "write on the reading" exercise. It helps the students, especially those who have little experience reading. So many have either little experience in academic reading or any type of reading. We discussed "Woman" by deBeauvoir in terms of denotation and connotation. Explaining the difference between the two terms required some time, but the students readily used the terms for the rest of the works. We skirted the issue of feminism within the essay and students picked up on this issue. I 'm pleased the students feel free to offer their opinions. Two or three are quiet. I'll be able to pull them in.

Also covered Hughes essay on the word "black." Students were catching on quickly and became surprised with all the negative connotations, especially when they are listed in one place. The left-right essay demonstrated etymology

and connotation. Students grasped the issues well. Actually this was a good start to the reading exercises.

The students met in their IP groups to break down topic assignments for research. I gave out future assignments which are due by spring break.

I worry that Ken has not handed in any of his papers. He does a decent job in his journals (quick, short sentences answering topic question, surface writing), but he seems to have trouble with formal assignments. I hope he does his share of the group project.

February 28

Today's class began slowly, a cloudy, dreary morning is difficult to start an 8am class. Things picked up, we went over the following:

Read D.H.Lawrence's "Emotional Mind" essay, discussed metaphor and simile. Students were able to understand and draw out the extended metaphor in the essay. Megan is bright, but she offers her answers tentatively. She's usually correct. The students were able to connect the phrases/words in the essay to the metaphor.

The immigration essay by Mary Gordon caused a more lively discussion. First, we talked about observation (details, facts, text) and inference (judgment based on observation). Then, we talked about the observations Gordon made

about the topic. The group connected her personal history to their own: How her grandparents experienced fear, discrimination, language problems and how they experience the same problems today. Roberto talked about how others may take advantage of some people's lack of language. We talked about humiliating experiences in front of immigration officials. We talked about her last line in the essay, and all the students heartily agreed with her conclusion that America would be dull without this splendid mix of cultures. We talked about the melting pot metaphor vs. the stew metaphor. A stew allows items to keep their individuality, but still blend together.

Groups worked on their IP. Research was due today. Students discuss procedures of presentations and ordering their works and created discussion questions/comments for full class discussion of their topics.

Rose talked to me about her journal; she finds writing in it therapeutic, and despite personal family problems, she feels she is doing well in school. She is, and she is a bright enthusiastic woman. She enjoys her identity as a student.

Trish and I met. She's recovering well and feels fine. She needed "to talk." She's open and honest. I don't want to reveal her entire personal situation so...She's caught up on work and ready to resume the class schedule.

March 2

I'm more organized today. We covered 99% of the material I needed to cover. We worked in groups, but the work was more centered because I did a better job of preparation. I did not want to lose the time we had with superfluous work. There are certain topics I wanted to cover before Spring Break, and I was concerned that I could not achieve this goal. Better preparation and I did well, the class responded.

On the board I wrote out a chart for Audience, Observation, Inference, Thesis. We covered the work in groups. The students determined the above information. They were able to analyze the essays and easily determine the first three areas.

Thesis statements, finding them in the essay was difficult. Not surprising, many of the students did not include thesis statements in their last papers. We talked about the controlling idea again...and they realized that the thesis statement does not have to be in the first paragraph, but can come later in the work. I said start drafts with the phrase, "I think that..." or "The purpose of this paper is to..." then cross out these words and turn the rest of the words into a complete statement. After seeing examples in the essays, the students had a better grasp.

Gary is becoming comfortable about demonstrating his knowledge and speaking out. He's doing well. Roberto was sleepy and a non-participant in his

group. I am sure it is his work schedule. He works with the Arlington police and their gang detail. He acts as a negotiator. I would like to draw out Chris and Tracy more. Tracy writes well, and Chris speaks up only in her groups.

March 7

Tannen's article always prompts students to offer their experiences in talking with the opposite sex. They work well in discussions where students offer their own views. In this diverse class students offer incredibly different comments about the male/female conversation. They enjoy relating their own particular stories about how they did/not communicate with their mate, parent or friend.

We noticed the difference in male/female activity in our classroom, and which group speaks up in class.

Tannen's article is a brief exposure to linguistics, and the study of cultural uses of language.

After we did the above, the students broke into groups to prepare the IP. Several students have dropped or disappeared from the class. This frustrates the more conscientious students. Laura was particularly frustrated today, worrying that Roberto's and Gary's absence and lack of work will affect the group's grade. I explained it would not.

The "welfare" group seems the most solid and prepared. The "computer" group works well together, but I'm concerned they're not prepared. The "immigration" group works hard, and they are the most diverse group. They take this problem personally; it truly affected their lives.

I reminded them to prepare a discussion question for the entire class. I also explained that their IP can be expanded into their final argument paper.

March 9

What a shame! Today's weather interfered with the presentation assignments. Some students came in late; a few did not show up at all. Perhaps the students had some confusion over the snow/ice policy.

The presentations went well. The best group – Welfare Reform – took the most time. Remember time limits next semester. The groups seem to have worked collaboratively. Censorship group had the most difficulty because a few members were not as conscientious as the others.

I'm impressed with the immigration group. All of them are immigrants, and they truly spoke from their hearts and experiences. They took the idea of prop 187 seriously and asked the class if this should be national policy.

The censorship group did speak well, but covered only a portion of the assignment. Laura was concerned that the lack of participation by others would reflect on her grade.

Computer group worked hard. Don and Anja kept showing skills as writers and researchers. Ken, I'm happy to say, did his work on time and handed it in, for the first time this semester. With modification, the IP will work well next time.

March 21

Frustration, frustration. I feel that I have been too lenient and flexible and that my students are taking advantage of me.

Several students did not come to class for the presentations or they did not call me with some sort of excuse. The icy weather certainly caused problems for the last class and the students were confused as to whether we had classes or not. However, they never called me at home either. They were surprised that I was angry in class. They said they did not want to disturb me during Spring Break! I told them that if they had not contacted me, they were to receive a O for the two parts of the IP – presentation and paper.

In addition, many students did not do the reading/journal assignment due for today. Therefore, they were not able to participate in our group discussions.

The essays – Hollander, Tobias, Sowell and Bettleheim – are important and worthy of investigation. Some students were able to comprehend the definition aspects of the essays. It was heartening to work with them.

Yanira came to me and is pleased that her work is improving. She said she went to the Writing Center for help. She feels hopeful, a pleasure to witness.

Brad and Gary wondered if they can hand in their IP and journals late! ugh!

Another frustration – meeting 2 times a week. I don't know if I've "connected" with my students as I should have or can. Last semester, I felt that I connected with many students better. I feel that I'm working well with some students, but I wonder what they think.

April 4

Sometimes the "lecture" mode works, of course some class participation is needed. I prepared the general information on illustration, comparison, contrast, analogy and classification. We reviewed the topics and applied the essays to the categories.

Students were concerned more about this argument paper than the information I was trying to cover. I asked them to wait until Friday, when they will

receive the handout. (I did answer their questions about the future project though).

We quickly went over the essays and did some classifications of our own: bars in D.C., movies, teachers. We then talked about Plato's essay, and they were intimidated. I asked if the author's name influenced their fears. Yes, it did. The allegory was difficult for the less mature students to grasp.

Met with Rose after class. She'll miss next week, but she's doing well, and I know she'll keep up her strong average.

The two of us discussed how today's session went well. Students participated well as a larger group. Sometimes I worry about too much dependence on small group work.

April 6

In class we discussed the assignment sheet for the argument paper. We also discussed various topics the students are interested writing about.

Samson talked about imperialism vs. socialism. We all talked about how this topic may not meet the requirements of an argument paper. It sounds more like a research topic. We offered ways to narrow it or even change it. Other students offered good topics: treatment of alcoholism, smoking bans in public

places, welfare reform, and affirmative action. These topics are certainly "do-able."

Conference with San. While grading her definition paper, I realized that her work/voice changed in the middle of the paper. It was not consistent with her first two paragraphs and not consistent with her past work. She wrote a translation of her father's letter from Vietnam. It was perfectly translated into English. Offering this work as her own translation surprised me. It was not along the lines of her past efforts. (Even in her journals, she took information from magazines and books to write her entries, not personal information but a direct quote from an outside source.) We discussed the paper and I carefully tried to find out if she had outside help. I asked her if this was her true voice? Yes, she first stated she did the translation. After I asked the same question different ways, she admitted that she did have help. As the conversation went further, she admitted that the translation was reviewed by her brother (a GMU student) and a friend, who lived here 15 years.

After much circuitous conversation, I told her she would receive an F on the paper. I would think about her rewriting it (which she did at the end of the semester, but still had help from some uncited outside source).

Later, I talked to Ellen who has encountered the same problems. She said she's more lenient with her composition classes than her 2nd semester literature

classes. I finally decided with her objective guidance, to give San an F and let her redo the project with an entirely new word.

April 11

Today, I spent part of the time lecturing from my notes on argument. I told the students that this information is important, yet many do not take notes nor even write the words down from the board. They do have the handout, perhaps they think this all they need. I enjoy going over my argument notes with my students. They began to understand that argument is not just yelling at each other. It is a logical process that requires intellect as well as emotions.

During/after the lecture we discussed their topics for their final papers. Going over their topics made them realize that they were thinking more research paper than argument paper. So we all asked each other about questions of what an argument is. Also they were somewhat surprised that they need to recognize the other side/view. They thought this was illogical because it gave "voice" to the other side. So we talked about the refutation process.

We also went over the "logical fallacies" sheet. This is always a popular assignment. Students came up with their own examples of how people use logical fallacies in their thinking, writing, and speaking. We talked about politi-

cians and the OJ trial and how logical fallacies are used throughout these circumstances.

The students appeared very concerned about their final projects. I wanted them to understand that it is achievable. They need to do the pre-work. Even though we talked about process, they still wait, and wait to do the work at the very end, but am I any different? Is this a human/student trait rather than a fault?

April 13

I repeated – and repeated – the format of the future definitions test. Often this is frustrating, not only to me but to the other students who have been paying attention (not just at that moment but for the semester).

We talked about any problems with the final paper, one or two serious ones. I'm meeting with these students.

We did the logical fallacies assignment. Students brought in examples from print media. We displayed them, then explained them to each other. Brad had a terrific flyer he received in Georgetown. I asked for a copy. I said it was the best example, I've seen. Advertisements were popular, and students offered each other suggestions about how other logical fallacies may apply to their ads.

Ken is having difficulty determining a topic. He's all over the lot, not quite sure what is an argument topic. He truly fades in and out. We talked about his

real interest – cars – then he said he could write about the cost of cars and how they're not worth it. Or, how people should take care of their cars. I think we settled on cost. I hope he understands what is expected. I keep explaining and explaining.

Roberto, finally (I hope), has a topic – punishment for child abusers. First, he wanted to do child abuse. I asked him, are you for it or against it. He said, "Against." I said, "Who isn't?" So we moved on to punishment. He seemed satisfied.

Trish came for a conference. We polished up her definition draft which is already one week late. Then, she started to pour her heart out about an argument she had with her parents about going to school and working. After listening for a while, I told her a school counselor may help and sent her in that direction.

April 18

Today, the students had the definitions test. I handed out the Richard Rodriguez essay last week so that they could prepare it for today. Few students took advantage of writing out the answers ahead of time.

Trish was absent again. I worry that she is taking advantage of me. Our "chats" have helped her, I think, but I believe that she sees me as a maternal figure rather than her teacher. Thus, I will be more lenient because I know about

her personal situation. Unfortunately, she's wrong. She has missed this test and has not competed the definition paper. She admits that she is lazy, but she refuses to take the responsibility to overcome this fault.

Roberto was absent also. He avoids all serious deadlines and assignments. He's an intelligent man who has a difficult job working with gangs for the police department. It's so hard to "forget" these problems when you're trying to perform as a teacher.

I asked San to meet me after class so that I can tell her that she can redo the definition paper. She did not show up.

April 20

We analyzed two essays today – A. Smith on gun control and A. Rich on claiming an education. In the gun control essay, I was trying to have the students see how Smith used personal anecdotes, facts, and statistics combined to make for a good essay. Smith does this well. The students could break down the essays and see how these elements worked in an argument paper.

The Rich article is aimed at a female audience; however, I asked them to substitute community college students for women in the essay, and then review the essay. I'm trying to have them see themselves as legitimate college students

who must claim an education and accept responsibility for thejr own education. They must be respected as students.

We also reviewed topics for their final papers. Some are still floating around because they have not focused on the issues. Some had done research and are prepared to write. I told them for Tuesday, they must hand-in their topic, a potential thesis, and a list of sources.

Samson asked "What is a thesis statement?" UGH! Other students looked at him with awe.

Roberto came to class, and I had him take the definition test right away. He took it in a separate part of the classroom. He was surprised, but he has avoided all important dates throughout the semester. Although he had the full class time, he said he did not have time to do the Rodriguez essays. He was given the essay and the questions ten days ago.

Most students did well on the test. I'm pleased Gary showed signs of real work. Brad did well, I think he was as surprised as I was.

April 24

Today we went over the works cited page, internal cites and the overall format of the paper. *Bedford* served as the students' guide. I told them they were

responsible for the cite page and should be able to find the information within the text. They paid careful attention.

Thursday the draft of the paper is due. Rumbles from some of the students. One complained about having "no time." Not much sympathy from me, I'm afraid. I reminded them that they had a month's notice on the assignment. Actually, they could see it listed on their syllabus the first day of classes. Other students expressed surprise over this "lack of time" comment.

We reviewed each student's sources and potential thesis statements. Most students have a list, many had the cites in hand. Few had a working thesis.

Some interesting topics. Some staid topics (euthanasia). Interestingly enough, not many chose their IP project topics for their argument papers. They went on to discover new topics, i.e. pornography over the Internet.

Graded Roberto's test, he failed. What's frustrating is that he had the essay for two weeks and did not work on the material, no preparation is evident on the sheet.

Ken and Trish were absent today. The two of them have several absences, and I can fail them as a result. Also they both have outstanding assignments. Trish has at least two. How do I motivate these students? They have the ability to pass the course, but they do little effort. Do I share some of this responsibility?

April 27

Drafts were due, and each student switched papers and read them for thesis and counter-arguments. Both are real problems. They found it difficult to discover these elements in each other's papers. But some were good, Don and Rose read out loud their thesis statements, and the class realized what good thesis statements are. Laura said the biggest problem is stating her opinion. We talked about buying groceries, making a choice based on an opinion. I encouraged them to begin with the statement "I think that..." and then cross out these three words, opinion formed.

Roberto (had the nerve) said that this was new work and I did not prepare the class for it. The whole group disagreed strongly and were shocked at his remarks. His absences and lack of participation reveal his lost attitude.

Brad came after class to have me review his paper. Quite good. He had a developed thesis and good back up research. He needs to cite paraphrased material, develop a counterargument and find other sources. Now, he's worried about passing the course with a good grade (deathbed conversion); I wish he had put in more effort over the last few months.

Talked to John Burton (NOVA teacher for years) about the lowering attendance over the semester. He believes that late withdrawal dates, low tuition and outside work commitments affect class attendance. I am also annoyed with the

late withdrawal dates. It's almost 2/3 into the semester. Tuition is affordable, that's a good quality. Students across the country have jobs. Its an economic necessity I can't do anything about. Withdrawal dates are fixable, at least to me they seem that way. It would help both the institution and the teacher.

May 2

Next to the last class and half the class shows up. I wonder who will actually turn in a paper on Thursday. Samson and Roberto don't even have drafts completed. Each one is tentative about their subject matter. Roberto has barely done any research. I spent the morning reviewing how to do cites within the paper and on the works cited page. Roberto comes up after class and asks me questions directly related to what we covered in class. I answered firmly, hiding my real frustration, I know if he did this in class, and he has, the other students would express their frustration.

Most students do seem prepared and are ready to handle their final work. They make this worthwhile. So do students like Gary who have tuned-in these last few weeks. Many students are frightened of the assignment, and I told them that I sympathize with them.

I showed them the final copy of a paper I will hand-in tonight. In addition, I read the first two paragraphs aloud because Samson can't grasp the idea of

writing in third person, and still expressing your feelings. He seems to understand after hearing my effort.

May 6

Final Class Day. Students did short presentations on their arguments. Most students showed up with their papers finished, except Roberto. I told him to put it in my mailbox by 5pm. He did.

Theorists and Issues to Explore:
A Bibliographic Review

While researching theory in the composition field, I discovered several critics who respond to the various issues related to the community college classroom. I found these critics helpful in my attempt to grapple with my students' writing difficulties, and these critics' work provided me with scholarship that examines many of the difficulties. For instance, Mina Shaughnessy's suggestion about individual goal sheets for students prompted me to implement a similar program for my students. Sandra Stotsky's essay on various aspects of honesty in writing helped me when I had a conference with San(Journal #I, Spring 1995). I tried very hard during that conference to explain to her that her work needed to be her own, not her brother's product.

Honesty, public vs. private language, gender studies, multiculturalism, diversity, and educational techniques have been issues that community college instructors have faced for years. Most essays and texts on these topics focus on the four-year college/university composition classroom. Yet, several authors examine issues which also coincide with the two-year institutions' learning environment. Probing their theories and beliefs and then manipulating them for

use in the community college classroom is an accessible approach for community college educators to construct their own body of scholarship.

In 1977, Mina Shaughnessy published *Errors and Expectations*, an innovative text which investigates the writing styles of the students who benefited from the new open admissions policy of the City University of New York. This book lucidly explains the differences and similarities among writing styles of the native born student, of the non-native student, of the basic learner, and of other students who are entering the composition process. She respects individual motivations and goals as well as their efforts to participate in academic writing.

While reviewing compositions – or any writing – teachers face an "almost irresistible [notion] to correct the students' assignments," Shaughnessy accurately recognizes an educator's temptation to try "to clear [errors] completely from a student's writing before moving on to other things"(91). The author demonstrates through examples of students' writings the urgency for an understanding of the variety of rhetorical elements within the English language. She dismisses the notion that non-standard English is "bad" or "wrong." She illuminates the notion that we employ many aspects of the English language according to need and situation. As minority and immigrant student populations increase, these realizations serve community college educators well.

Shaughnessy aptly describes the pressures on a student while he is learning to master first-year composition. The student wishes to "avoid the punishment of a bad grade, or more broadly, the social penalty that comes from not being able to use the prestigious dialect"(124). For this critic, this is a negative learning method. Fortunately, she offers concrete suggestions to motivate this anxious student as well as other students in the classroom. These suggestions for "potential sources of motivation" incorporate her theories about composition and language studies with practical activities the instructor can perform within a student centered classroom. She respects the different forms of communication and writing: informal journal entries, in-class group exercises, or formal argument papers. Shaughnessy recognizes the needs of the once ignored "basic writer," thus opening up the composition process. Her monumental efforts are a significant contribution to community college educators who work at similar institutions which honor the open admissions policy. Shaughnessy's analysis of students' work serves as a guide for these instructors who wish to develop their own theory and practice concerning the community college student population.

David Bartholomae's essay, "Inventing the University," acknowledges the academic – and often social – demand that students must learn "to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding and arguing that define the discourse of our

community"(134). Throughout the essay, he repeats that students "must learn our language"(136). The marginalized community college student benefits from Bartholomae's recognition of an hierarchy within the academy which demands that a writer must "imagine and write from a position of privilege"(139). These are pertinent issues which the community college educator and student must wrestle with in the classroom. Demonstrating respect for both the individual's private language community and the demands of the academic language community compels the instructor to determine or to devise a theory which reflects her own praxis. As a result of this essay – and others – I altered my syllabus to include essays and writing assignments which focus on the issues of public vs. private language. These assignments are discussed in my chapter reviewing this topic.

After reviewing Bartholomae's essay, I also found Richard Courage's work, "The Interaction of Public and Private Literacies," sympathetic to my classroom experience. He accentuates the value of private literacy, and he reveals a more flexible attitude toward the composition process. He distinguishes between academic literacy and "non school" literacy, yet he does not make one area of literacy subservient to the other. He clarifies that "academic literacy works to constrain plain speaking and passionate advocacy and that it privileges such cultural expressions of the dominant social class...while suppressing or ignoring

cultural expressions of marginalized groups"(484-5). Most importantly, Courage speaks to making academic literacy "more accessible." Educators need to "explore...literacy practices outside of the context of the college classroom"(493). While adopting models from other academic disciplines, composition teachers are able to help students bridge the gap between their own private literacy and the academic literacy. These efforts will help college composition students from various cultures achieve a sense of accomplishment in the academic community without erasing the beauty of their private literacies.

Postmodernist and author of a variety of texts, Lester Faigley offers an enlightening effort to describe and to consolidate various perspectives of composition theory in his essay, "Competing Theories of Process: A Critique and a Proposal." This work discusses the expressive view, cognitive view, and social view of composition theory. Instructors interested in exploring these views of the writing process may realize that they have already adopted one or more of these theories. Prewriting exercises, group discussions, re-vision exercises, and collaborative projects trace their roots back to one of these significant principles. More importantly, Faigley inspects writing as part of a structure of power. Constantly exploring spaces to listen to voices often marginalized in the writing community, he examines the underlying notion of power and the composition process. For example, Faigley questions why the political significance of various texts are often

ignored in the classroom. Closer to the instructor's position, Faigley reflects upon the status of the composition classroom within English departments, the dependence upon part-time workers and graduate students, and who are the composition instructors serving – their students or the university. This is a significant essay for the community college educator who is trying to distinguish the space that she and her students can occupy in the composition dialogue.

As stated earlier in this project, Helen Fox's students' profiles are similar to many students attending community colleges. They are students who come to the United States with undergraduate or advance degrees from institutions from around the world. These students from Africa, Asia and South America learned English as their first, second, third, or even fourth language. Fox's students arrive at her office in the writing workshop frustrated with comments and grades from American professors who fail to understand their individual writing process. This failure causes the students to suffer serious setbacks within their new academic setting. Most of their professors "are unable or unwilling to give them much feedback on content because they can't make heads or tails of the argument"(1). The instructors demonstrate irritation, frustration and often rudeness in their comments. Some are even too arrogant or are too self-absorbed to acknowledge and to validate any other way of learning. Fox states:

> even in the writing of the more abstract disciplines at the U.S. university, there is an underlying *tendency* to directness, to precise

> relationships between verbs and their subjects, to clear relatively obvious transitions, to announcements of intent and summary statements(20).

Because of the American obsession to do things fast, these requirements seem "natural" to the American way of life. The culture values directness: "get to the point," "what's the purpose here," and "what are you driving at" are all common expressions not only in the academy, but also in our society. Fox succinctly states that this is not the way of life in other world cultures. Explicitness and directness are not found in the non-European based cultures. Yet, professors look for the qualities mentioned above in each essay, not realizing that some students' voices are rooted in cultures which reject these requirements. Fox's work encourages educators to examine their own attitudes towards the "world majority student" who does not adopt our academic cultural identity. When questioning the doctrines already in place in some community college and university classrooms, educators in each demonstrate a willingness to open up the conversations about academic standards, goals, and directions. Otherwise, compliant students may just regurgitate material and meet the requirements to graduate; this clearly questions the definition of "learning."

Min Zhan Lu proposes comments and practical suggestions which challenges Mina Shaughnessy's efforts in 1971. Lu's scholarship investigates "teaching methods which invite a multicultural approach to style, particularly those styles of

student writing which appear ridden with 'errors'"(442). She speculates that teachers are often frustrated with students' obsession about proper usage or editing, "writing correctly." For example, Giordana(Journal #1 Spring 1995) constantly asked me to correct her journal entries even though they were not officially graded. She wanted them to be grammatically correct, and we worked together to achieve her goal.

Lu also criticizes teachers for marginalizing students and labeling them as "outsiders" in the writing process(443), thus considering them "beginners" who must be initiated into the academy. This positions the teachers – and some researchers – in an hierarchical location in the classroom or in theoretical texts. This distinction between "beginner" and "insider" demands an acknowledgment of difference, not division. Neither Giordana, nor any of the other students that semester were "beginners"; many had attended other colleges from around the world. They may not be considered "insiders" by some members of the academy, but their efforts displayed a style and maturity which I admired.

Lu observes the texts of noted authors who react to their publishing editors' corrections of their "blundering 'errors'"(444), and she applauds those authors who recognize that sometimes style and error go hand-in-hand. Yielding to authority and "indicating a passive stance towards the hegemony of ethnocentrism and linguistic imperialism" crushes style and originality(445). Supportive

educators should aim to prompt students to examine their own style and originality in constructive, critical ways. As a result, students become fully conscious of the choices they make while writing and re-writing their papers.

"Perfectly educated" writers can write with style, but more importantly "partially educated" writers can also write with style. Dismissing community college students' works as marginal or not worthy to be read by anyone else but the student and the teachers promotes the hegemonic attitudes that have dominated many discussions about composition and education. Community college instructors profit from reviewing Lu's work along side of Shaughnessy's and from determining which theory or method – or parts of theory or method – they feel serves their students' writing experiences. Both critics promote the theory that students take control of their own writing and editing decisions, a theory community college educators should applaud because many of their students have been discouraged by past composition experiences.

Encouraging students to take control of their own writing and editing creates a more open classroom experience which places more authority in the hands of the students. Jennie Nelson reminds educators that many students are "already longstanding members of the culture of school and are highly literate about how classrooms work"(411). The students already possess some intuitive abilities, they understand the notions of power and authority in the classroom –

who composes the assignments, who assesses the assignments. Nelson carefully explains that students "learn acceptable patterns of behavior, such as when and how to ask questions, and what kinds of responses are expected in class discussions"(412). Many students try to interpret the professor's expectations on writing assignments and are willing to "throw away" the first one or two papers.

One particular problem Nelson discusses is the nature of the assignment. She reviews directions from professors and demonstrates how these directions may misguide the students. They may not be explicit enough, and the open-ended assignment may force the students to make incorrect assumptions. Or, the assignments may be too tightly controlled, and the students only follow a blueprint set out by the professor. What Nelson asked professors to do is to follow their students' lead and learn to read their own classrooms as texts. Composition instructors at all institutions need to craft their assignments with care. The students are "savvy insiders, actively interpreting their options as writers as they read the often implicit clues that signal what a teacher expects and values in student writing"(426). Therefore, if students appear misguided or confused on certain assignments, the instructor can disperse authority by asking for the students' help when reworking an assignment, thus creating a "thought collective."

Formulating "thought collectives," dispersing authority, and establishing writing communities within classrooms are activities that Kenneth Bruffee applauds. In his text, *Collaborative Learning: Higher Education, Interdependence, and the Authority of Knowledge*, Bruffee stresses issues which are closely related to the mission of the community college. He emphasizes reevaluating classroom learning, connecting classroom learning to work in the "real world," and understanding the "new language" of the academy. He explains these issues while maintaining a respect for the individual student and his intelligence. He recognizes that for most students:

> The craft of interdependence is not new to most college and university students. Many of them already know they will need it when they go to work in the "real" world of government, industry, business, finance, and the professions where collaboration, consultation, and teamwork are increasingly the norm, not the exception.(1)

Most students in community college have some work experience and know that they must work in conjunction with others. The format for learning in higher education fails to acknowledge this "real" world fact. Professors stand at the front of the lecture hall or classroom and reveal in increments portions of knowledge that they feel their students need to know. Students sit apart from fellow classmates and diligently copy down these portions of knowledge into their notebooks. Later, students regurgitate this knowledge in papers or on examinations assigned by the professor. Little discussion occurs, either between the student and the

professor, or among the students themselves. The semester's work is structured and planned to fulfill preordained requirements. As a result, students and professors are alienated from each other.

Bruffee challenges this type of learning while discussing the sensitive subject of authority. He confirms "a teacher's right to teach derives directly or indirectly from the prevailing understanding of the authority of knowledge"(127). This ownership of knowledge is implicit in the professor's position in the classroom. She claims to own the knowledge, and she will dispense it in her own individual manner. Collaborative learning displaces this authority and power. Each individual negotiates boundaries; each individual studies the problem; each individual offers solutions; each individual comments on his colleague's solutions and recommendations. Each individual accepts his own authority in the project and respects his colleague's authority. Through the processes of negotiations, interaction, and interdependence, authority is distributed throughout the learning community.

Bruffee's work inspired me to create a group inquiry project for my own students. As revealed in my journals, these were successful assignments, not only academically, but socially as well. The students experienced similar expectations and frustrations that Bruffee discusses, yet each semester the students recommended that the project stay in the syllabus.

Ira Shor encourages a pedagogy for individual and social change in his work, *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change*. He emphasizes a student centered program which he believes benefits the multicultural classroom and the democratic society. The community, and individuals grow together for Shor. The active, cooperative, and social processes interconnect for this growth. "Human beings do not invent themselves in a vacuum, and society cannot be made unless people create it together"(15). In addition to academic knowledge, Shor encourages the development of strong skills, habits of inquiry, and critical curiosity about the community and the individual. Shor makes the distinction between the student centered classroom and the self-centered student. The learning process is social, not selfish. For instance, during the inquiry project sessions, students shared research on another group's topic which they had found while doing their own research. All of society benefits from developing knowledge. However, several obstacles to empowering education and critical thought exist, and, as indicated in my journals, I encountered many of them: prior schooling, uneven levels of development, vocationalism, family life, health, authority, training in research, and institutional clout.

Because the majority of students in America's community colleges are women, Elizabeth A. Flynn's essay, "Composing as a Woman," offers to the instructor a brief essay which succinctly connects composition studies to feminist

theory. She aptly lists the composition "field's foremothers" which is a dictionary of respected theorists who are all women. Even Flynn's description of feminist research and theory reminds the reader of terms used to describe composition studies: "suppressed, silenced, marginalized, written out of what counts as authoritative knowledge"(425). If "men become the standard against which women are judged," then perhaps, "literature is the standard against which composition is judged"(425). Moreover, Flynn uses the terms "difference and dominance" when discussing issues concerning feminist studies. These two words can also be applied to composition studies in the community college classroom.

Two aspects of Flynn's essays speak directly to the two-year college instructor. "The marginality of the field of composition studies is linked in important ways to the political marginality of its constituents, many of whom are women who teach part-time"(424). In both two and four-year schools women serve the academic community. Various disciplines expect the composition instructor to cover all of the key elements in writing an academic paper. The members of other departments assume that she is their support system. In addition to this service, composition instructors need to observe their students as *men* and *women* who perhaps demonstrate gender differences in their struggles to write. Female students need to discover their own active voices in their own writing, or as Flynn states, "make present that which has been absent"(434). This

empowerment is significant to the female community college student. Often she has a family, a job, and a household to maintain along with her academic studies. As a result of these experiences, her ideas and dilemmas deserve validation in the writing process.

Sandra Stotsky offers a solution to a serious problem in student's writing, as a matter of fact this problem is evident in many arenas where ideas are communicated. In "Conceptualizing Writing as Moral and Civic Thinking," she believes that the principle problem students need to recognize is "irresponsible thinking in their writing" and "ethical, or principled, thinking across a broad spectrum of moral concerns is fundamental to academic ways of knowing"(794). Stotsky uses terms such as "moral principles" in the act of writing, and these words might be red flags to some theorists. Yet, when few people are responsible for their use of language, this theorist discusses thoughtful, relevant material which is of value in the classroom.

Initially, Stotsky directs her essay to the important issue of teachers who concentrate on their social and political values in the classroom. She warns that composition teachers "should guide thinking and learning about any topic," not just those topics a professor deems important. She believes that moral issues are interesting to cover in a composition class; the question remains as to how will those topics be approached in discussions and compositions. Engaging students

in critical thinking benefits them in the academic world as well as members of a larger community.

Stotsky faults composition textbooks for not fully addressing the issue of ethics in composition. They concentrate on plagiarism rather than logical fallacies. Although some texts do address the problems of ethics in composition, these discussions are largely ignored by the world outside of the classroom. A challenge arises when an instructor introduces the issues of fallacies while the student is surrounded by a society that ignores these areas of moral thinking. After reading their students' work, an instructor may realize that the students fall easily into errors of reasoning and oversimplified arguments.

Despite the theory of writing one subscribes to, Stotsky offers a place for moral reasoning to all members of the composition community. If teachers can raise the topic of ethics in relation to social issues, they certainly can raise it in relation to compositional issues. A student can develop his own thinking and personal values. *How* he determines his own moral compass is Stotsky's point. Stotsky states that "a writer's failure to observe desirable standards of clarity, coherence or courtesy, as in egocentric writing or writer-based prose, has been treated in recent years almost wholly as a cognitive, not moral phenomenon"(798). "Effective *and* responsible" writing can be achieved, and Stotsky believes that it is essential to a "republican form of self-government"(798).

Toward the conclusion of her work, Stotsky reminds her reader that the writers' obligations to their readers and other writers cover a wide range of responsibilities, from what all would undoubtedly regard as basic academic standards to what some may think are 'simply' good academic manners. Teaching critical thinking is teaching "responsible thinking"(806). She reminds educators that "moral virtue can be taught without indoctrinating students"(806). After all, educators are teaching students to be participants in the academic community and to be participants in the global community.

Jerry Mirskin considers valuing as an intimate element to the act of writing. Meaning is also related to "context, the environment or conditions in which language functions and figures meaning"(388). These contexts are shared attitudes or values; moreover, they are not "simply a store of shared and neutral knowledge, but rather a charged ground that provides currency to utterance"(388). Meaning, for Mirskin has a "valuative nature." This valuative nature "determines the form and content of what we attend to as it selects from an infinite world and assigns meaning"(389). However, value is social. It is determined within a culture; it is not determined within a vacuum. All aspects of speech, understanding, and making meaning are value laden for the speaker and the listener, the writer and the reader.

Mirskin concentrates on "language use" and how meaning in language is valued. He discusses how language is "molded in relation to other's language"(301), yet he rarely uses the term "culture" when discussing value in language or writing. He explains the relationship between language used in a social context and how the value of the meaning is determined by those using the language at that time. He states that "the act of speaking or writing itself is an activity that involves taking a social attitude or valuative stance toward the world"(391). This is particularly true of academic writing. Language is a constant act of making meaning, and this is constantly done selectively and purposefully.

Helen Fox's "world majority" students and many community college students from various cultures participate in their own multiple acts of valuing. They come to the academy and must adjust from their home cultures to the academic culture. Mirskin explains that "to respond" to their writing effectively "we need to understand our students' writing as forms of behavior and involvement in the world"(409). A professor's response to a student's work is responsible for that student to become a creator of meaning in the academic community; the culture which helped shape his values may help reshape the academy.

For the instructor who includes literature in the composition classroom, Terry Eagleton's *Literary Theory: An Introduction* is an excellent primer. Several of the issues present in this text can be formulated for the English literature

students in the community college. Because many community college students are adults who have not attended college or school for several years, terms such as poststructuralism, semiotics, and hermeneutics may be intimidating to these returning students. However, Eagleton offers precise explanations and analogies which can be understood by the novice literature student, and portions of the text are excellent supplements for literary discussion.

Eagleton opens his work with the question, "What is literature?" He continues to review different views, opinions, and definitions throughout his work. Most importantly, he periodically acknowledges that "power" is an issue which is closely associated with literature. Literature is often defined as "imaginative writing," but this description excludes many of the essays which are included in literature. His question concerning literature as "language used in a special way" is an excellent topic for discussion in the community college classroom. Eagleton does assert that literature is the product of particular cultural events, not a part of nature. Within this culture are people and institutions in control: those who designate a work as valuable or worthless; those who label work as part of the canon; and those who discourage works from being included in the canon.

Many community college students observe literature as interrelated to society, history, and culture. This opens the canon and views "others" as worthwhile. Since Eagleton's text was first written in 1983, and then revised in 1989,

he concentrates on feminists and Marxists as the "others." However, over the years many critics have included a much more diverse audience as the "other," something Eagleton alludes to in his text. When discussing Mikhail Bakhtin, Eagleton offers a glimpse of the possibility of inclusion. "Bakhtin shifted attention...to the concrete utterances of individuals in particular social contexts. Language was to be seen as inherently 'dialogic': it could be grasped only in terms of its inevitable orientation toward another"(117). For Eagleton, Bakhtin eliminates the "monolithic system" of language; it loses its "specialness" since people use language continually.

Community college students come from various social classes, are gendered, and are loaded with ethnic characteristics and cultural influences. They do not abide by a "monolithic system" of language. They explode the barriers and open literature to voices who offer new and valid analysis. Moving away from the strident term "literature" allows more voices to enter the academy, fostering "in them a sense of linguistic potential denied to them by their social conditions"(Eagleton 212). Community college students deserve inclusion in the academic conversation.

These works are only a short listing of what I found helpful to my own particular experience teaching in the composition classroom. Many more exist,

and they are worth exploring for ideas and suggestions which the community college theorist can incorporate into her own scholarship on composition theory.

Journal #2
Fall 1995

August 28

First Day of Classes/Beginning my 6th year

I arrived early and ready. Beginnings are always refreshing - renewal - next chance - new view - and a chance to revisit what I found successful in the past.

The class seemed so quiet. Early morning - 8am - is always a challenge, and the students look like they're not used to the early hour.

Reviewed my new syllabus - learned from past mistakes - absences and late work are always a problem, and my syllabus reflects my newer and more strict attitude toward these problems. Also reviewed the plagiarism page, this is a tough concept for many students to comprehend.

The class wrote out their index card information, and I went over their names in class. I'm embarrassed I cannot pronounce some of the student's names. I feel inept in my efforts, and I ask for their help.

Once again, the class has a diverse population. I' m anxious to see how they will react to our readings for the semester. The book offers so many voices. I hope the class will respond.

I asked the question, "How many languages do you speak?" Received the typical answers, students only stated the languages of their nationalities or the ones they learned in school. I spoke about how many languages they *do* speak. Students respond well to this discussion of the multiple facets of even the English language (math, science, rap, etc.)

We discussed standard English as one of the facets, one language they will learn, but they already have some knowledge. I'm trying to avoid/clear up any fears they may have about SE.

Came back to the department office which is alive, vibrant and full of dedicated people ready to serve the students. (Sounds corny, but true.)

August 30

More students today, filled out to 27.

They seem more attentive than other 8am classes I have taught. Secondly, we broke into groups to do the "cut-up" project. I like this assignment because it encourages students to know each other, and I also become familiar with each student's name. After handing out the assignment, I discovered that the group members were not talking to each other. I was reviewing names out loud, this may have caused them to be quiet. I then said that we're working in groups for a purpose. "Talk to each other; ask questions." I walked over to the quietest group

and said "What did you get for the first paragraph?" This started the group to talk to each other. Conversations began.

After class I quickly reviewed the syllabus with the new students, and then I answered some quick questions on tonight's assignment.

How do I try to impress them that the grammar assignments are important and helpful, but yet not intimidate them? I *always* relate the information to their writing, and I want them to be able to find their problem areas in the book. Use the book as a reference rather than as a bible.

September 1

More new students, and it's the third class. They've missed so much material already. I am frustrated by this idea of late registration. Also every desk is taken. I now have 28 students registered for my class. I know some will drop out, but 28 is large for an English composition course. I need to pay attention to each student's needs. I always wonder if this can be accomplished in such a large class.

I do worry about the ESL students. Often they appear confused, but they do not ask questions. How do I pull them out into the discussion?

I met with Rebecca after class to review the grammar homework. She is quiet and appeared nervous in our meeting. She relaxed, and we reviewed the

work she had difficulty with (pronoun/antecedent agreement). She was proud of her efforts once she understood the material. She's a single mother with a one-year old child; she's working hard to succeed.

September 6

Group work will be a positive technique for this class. We did a group assignment which focused on grammar, but also encouraged the students to get to know each other. I passed out the index cards with the grammar areas written on them. "Pick a card, any card." Then the students divided into groups. When I said begin, the students looked up the grammar rule in the text and then explained it to their fellow students. People helped each other explain rules, and lively discussions were going on in each group.

I put off the test until Monday because the students seem very quiet during these 'lectures,' and they didn't ask questions. I explained that when reviewing this material, I am assuming that they have had grammar in a former life. This may be a mistake, but I also said that they need to look up any problem in their book, or ask me in class.

A newly registered student arrived, and I explained that she could not miss any classes for the semester. I handed her the material, then taught class. After

the class, she explained that she was in the wrong class. Either I frightened her with the work or she was truly in the wrong room.

Open registration and at such a late date is a problem for the student and the teacher. The student arrives after assignments have been given, completed and handed in. The teacher needs to 'redo' the first few days with the student at a time outside of class. Frustration.

September 8

I realized that I crammed too much material into the beginning of the syllabus. Therefore, I postponed the grammar test until Monday. So I needed to research some grammar activities for today' class. *Nuts and Bolts* serves as an excellent source for grammar material.

I gave them a list of topics for the test and then asked them for questions. One or two students began a few questions, but I asked the class (not me) to answer.

Next I asked them to write two "incorrect" sentences on a sheet of paper. I passed the papers around the room. The students were to correct the sentences and give the reason for their correction. This exercise went well (from N&B).

The class time passes so quickly on a MWF schedule. I really prefer a T-Thur schedule with longer class times. I can devote so much more time to the

students and materials. An 8am class always has "late arrivals" thus exacerbating the problem.

I also read their journal #1 entries. These questions on language encourage thoughtful, provocative responses from my students. I really enjoy reading their entries, and I enjoy reading work which I don't have to grade. Responding to what they write is a pleasurable exercise, grading is stressful. I wonder if I'm really helping them as writers when I grade, or am I discouraging them? I do follow some of the suggestions in composition theory, but I don't want to be a "traffic cop" in the writing process.

September 11

Today, the grammar test.

Grammar - The students' own writings indicate a need to understand grammar well enough to find an answer/guide rule in their textbook. These students often write a formal essay in the same broken English they speak. Especially the Vietnamese students. Is this a problem? I think it is for the reader. Many times without eye contact, body language, you can understand what someone is saying in a conversation. On the written page this transition of ideas needs clarification. The writer is physically absent, so communication through the written word needs to be precise.

I respect the private language but I feel that to contribute to the social, civic, and economic well-being of the individual in today's society, a knowledge of standard English is necessary.

Standard English is the formal language of the academy, society and business, it is not the *only* language necessary to survive these three areas of life, but certainly a skill which enhances a person's ability to participate in the economic aspects of American society.

September 13

Students handed in their final copy of paper #1. Several did not have it typed, so I had them take it back and type it. This type of hard-nosed attitude bothers me, but I know – after some experience – that I have to insist on certain demands early on in the semester. Typed papers are important to me because with my eye-sight I can't read handwritten material very well.

I reviewed basic mechanics in class – commas, semi-colons, colons, quotations, and underlining. While working on the board and reviewing the material, I noticed that the class is beginning to congeal. They ask questions, even the "quiet" ones (Linh and Vy) and participate more. Often they called out answers. I'm pleased that this is happening. The feeling of community is so important in the two-year college classroom. Many of the students take classes

and then run off to work or family without the opportunity to know their classmates. I told them to exchange phone numbers because if they are absent they can call each other for assignments.

Alice is working hard to catch up – the late registration process may bring in more student dollars, but it does a disservice to the students. They have to make up at least *five* class days of work.

September 15

Today, I'm experimenting with the mechanics test. I've done this before on the high school level. I assigned the students to groups (basically alpha), handed out the test to each student, but I told them that they are to do the test collaboratively. One test grade for all members of the group. In many areas of life people work as a group to achieve a goal. They succeed as a group. They work on a project that is significant to them. Everyone contributes to the effort, results may be successful or not.

In addition, this helps the students get to know each other in a more interactive manner. They rely on each other's thoughts and opinions to make a final decision.

And... it's working today. ("I love it when a plan comes together!") The students are conversing, offering opinions, suggestions, and working diligently on the test. And they seem to be enjoying the process.

This class is wonderfully diverse, an excellent blend of several cultures (Asian, African-American, Latino, Persian, African), and the diversity in ages is also apparent (married women w/ children, single mothers, 18yr olds, members of the military, older returning students).

September 18

The class seems so sleepy on a cloudy, cool day. Pulling them into discussion and getting them to pay attention on these sleepy type days is very difficult. I used G. Kettlewell's idea of listing three ideas from the first 2 chapters which they think are important to discuss. I called on a few students to begin the discussion, and we headed in the right/write direction.

Their ideas about topic sentences, thesis statements and point of view were discussed. I reviewed my "McDonald's as audience" discussion. Students tend to relate to this illustration because they have witnessed McDonald's commercials throughout their day. (Saturday commercials as example). They seem amused by the obvious targeted audiences that McD's appeals to throughout a Saturday's TV programming.

Examples about point of view are the most difficult for students to grasp. Making an opinion statement in third person on a topic is tough for them to handle. I explain that if they write "I think that..." and then eliminate the first three words to the sentence, they have a third person argument statement.

I have not finished grading my papers. This is unusual for me. I think I'm having a re-entry problem with teaching school and home life. I need much more time to do my work, and I'm frustrated that I'm having difficulty. I need to lock myself up in the house to complete the work. This frightens me a little. I'm normally very much on top of things, organized to a fault. Hopefully, when September is over I'll be pulled together and back into my regular routine.

September 20

Rebecca has missed her second class in a row, and I'm worried. She is a single mother who is raising a young child. Her essays indicate the difficulty she has to get through in order to attend community college. She has a desire to go to school, I'm worried that the stress will defeat her. She's anxious in our meetings and is willing to take any suggestions, so eager to please.

Buffy is a mom and writes about her experiences of working, family, and school. She said that she can't write. I told her that in her first essay, I recognized her "voice" and that it is true to whom she is and what she does.

These women remind me of when I finished my undergraduate degree at Georgetown University. I was the first mother with a child and family they accepted. I did not know this at the time, thank God. All I needed was more pressure. So I sympathize with these student moms. They work hard and indicate a strong desire to succeed.

We reviewed a class list of writing problems (problems particular to this class, a compilation of all of their mistakes). I'm always amazed that groups share similar problems. But as a whole, I see them as a class with potential. I also worry, can I bring about this potential? Can I reach them? Can I tap into what their potential is? I'm sure other teachers worry about this.

Meet with Dulce for a brief time today. I finally told someone my fears. Can I do this program? Can I succeed? I had a difficult experience last spring which shook my confidence. When I begin to think of what is ahead of me, I freak! I place pressure upon myself to do work, to succeed, and I take criticism to heart, which is a problem. Perhaps in a few weeks, after I've done some assignments, I will become more relaxed.

The maternal/teacher role, the mother/confessor role: The student's essays revealed some of their private lives. Do they tell me these intimate thoughts and details because I am a woman. Would they come and discuss their personal lives with a man? Are women perceived as more sympathetic? maternal? Often, I find

the maternal role comfortable, it may be because I am a mother of a 21 yr old, 16 yr old, and 14 yr old. Therefore, I have some experience with young people. I value my sympathetic ear, and never want to give it up. But it can be a burden. I've had conferences with students about an abortion, terminally ill child, and the daughter who is having a baby out of wedlock. Their stories through essays and journals continually remind me what these people must confront in their lives outside of the classroom.

Am I creating writing situations that encourage these remarks? I need to review this issue.

September 22

Sometimes a class/or students surprise me. First of all, I was very tired and not feeling well, 8am was not a time I wanted to be "on." My stomach was upset, the day was dreary, wet, and I knew that these types of mornings can be the most challenging. Students are sleepy and many straggle in late – not a perfect pedagogical moment.

I wanted to finish up our work in *Bedford,* – move on – let them write – investigate – read – and write again. I sensed that the students were restless also. (I do believe that a teacher needs to "feel the pulse of the class" and move forward or backward – depending on their needs.)

I broke them up into groups and assigned different sections of the reading text. I told them to review the section and report to the class the 2 or 3 significant points in these sections. The students came through. They reviewed the sections and were thoughtful in their selections. I wrote the important areas on the board as the groups reported them, and then we discussed the areas as needed. We/I need to remind myself that the students can be very alert to the different writing problems and are willing to share their particular problems or successes with the class.

I kept watching Jason during this whole procedure. His first paper was clever and well-written. His grades have been good so far. I'm afraid that he thinks the material we are reviewing is beneath him, but he has a good sense of humor, and he has not displayed any rudeness to his classmates or to me. When I look at him, I do wonder, "What *is* he thinking?"

Well, after class he waited until all the other students finished their comments to me. He handed me a piece of paper. It was a flyer for a play he is in. The community theater which is performing the play has won awards and is highly regarded. I know this because of my past position on the Alexandria Commission for the Arts. *Marvin's Room* is the play, and Jason is in the play. He says he has a small role, but he was so proud. He wants me to attend. I said I would try and congratulated him.

Now...the next few weeks is busy with school and family life. I want to try to see this play, I know it would please Jason. How do I handle this dilemma? I don't want to disappoint him for doing something positive, but I don't know if I really have the time.

Dung spoke to me after class. He has difficulty writing in English (he's Vietnamese). His grammar is stilted, and he has problems with syntax. I suggested the writing center. He told me he works full time and doesn't have time for the WC. I said I could work with him after class. He seemed pleased and said he would be willing to meet with me.

September 25

Students seemed relieved that we have "finished" with the *Bedford*. I'm sure some consider this section dry, although most of them need a refresher/ review of the writing process, grammar, and mechanics. As usual they have the most difficulty with syntax. The reading portion of the course will help them see how other writers express their thoughts. Hopefully, students can connect the two processes.

They read Stern in class, NPR essay, and I observed their reading process. I next asked them to pick up a pen/pencil and respond to the writing. Does it define their own personal experiences? Do they agree/disagree? with the authors

premise/argument? I told them that they need to start "chewing on" what they read, respond, look it over more than once.

I copied most of the next few weeks of work, question sheets, IQP project and my dissertation survey. I feel like I'm on top of what needs to be done. I found that I need to stay home and spend several hours for 2 or 3 days to keep up with what needs to be done for my students. "Be Prepared" is a motto for teachers as well as students. I feel a heavy responsibility to have materials readily at hand, so the class is continually moving forward.

Balancing teaching at NOVA, classes at GMU, and home life becomes overwhelming when I *think* about it, but if I do prepare ahead of time, I feel more in control.

September 27

The class seemed enthusiastic about the reading assignments. They were ready to discuss the issues presented by hooks, Walker and Rich. I told them to divide into groups themselves, choose which author they felt the strongest about. Walker was the largest group. More of the minority students chose hooks, and Rich's group was the most vocal.

Walker's story raised some questions on Dee/Wangero's attitude toward her mother, sister, and family artifacts. Buffy was annoyed by the character's

behavior. Jason didn't find this to be a problem. A conversation began among the members of the group, more agreed with Buffy.

When discussing hooks, Tony took the lead. I'm glad. He's bright but quiet, and his essays demonstrate a desire to dig into issues. He found an affinity with hooks' description of being a black student in a majority white institution. He agreed that staid lecturing at the college level is boring and doesn't encourage him to dig deeper.

When Rich's essay criticizes white males' domination of the academy, Steve and Michael took great exception. They said "Why is it always my/our fault?" They feel a burden has been placed upon them because they are white middle class males.

I asked them the date of the essay (1977) and the audience (Douglas College, female students). I suggested that they talk about Rich's issues in those terms first, then substitute community college students for female students. Does it change their views? I walked away, leaving them to discuss the issues for themselves.

Today, I made sure we reviewed the rest of Walker, Rich and hooks. I figured that since the students had discussed the work as groups, they would be ready to discuss them as a class. (In addition, the students finished a question sheet involving the works.) Perhaps they were tired of the material. I asked them

to search hooks' essay for key words – isolation, oppression, liberation, madness. We did review how hooks connected these terms to the theme of her work.

October 2

I handed out the IQP sheet. Reviewed the directions and reviewed the topics to be researched. The students seemed more concerned about this practical aspect of their class meeting than the above discussions. "When is it due?" "How do you determine the groups?" were the types of questions asked.

Wednesday they will sign up for groups and then go to the library for a tour of the research tools available to them. I need to set some type of goal for Friday (6th) when we discuss the standard English and national language essays. I am interested in how they feel about the issues. Perhaps I'll sit down and take notes and have several students lead the discussion. I want to get their reactions for two reasons: 1 - the essays directly relate to their journal questions, and 2 - the essays and their reactions relate to my dissertation subject.

Many of my students reflect upon the idea of SE in their journals. They confuse "improper" English with "dishonest" English when they answered the question. Most students made the "mistake," especially foreign born students. Imagine the impact of this. We will discuss this issue on Friday.

October 4

The semester field trip to the library for a tour of the computer equipment. Students usually seem aloof during this tour, not realizing how important it is for them. The computers at NOVA/Alex are helpful and serve as adequate research tools. If they knew how to use these computers then they could also work on the computers at the local university libraries. (GMU's are very similar.) I need to remind them that they can take books out of the GMU library.

Gone are the days of old, card catalogs, etc. Students don't realize how lucky they are, boy, do I sound ancient. But so much is done for them. I wonder if they fully understand the potential pressure of too much available information. (I feel this pressure in my own doctoral program.) Anyway, I'm sure they're not feeling this, yet.

I realized that I'm being too "soft." I'm concerned because I have them doing several informal writings – journals, questions for readings – right now. They do have a writing assignment each night, but we are just gradually working into the three academic papers for the semester.

They signed up for the IQP today. I separated some of the stronger students to equalize the groups. This is a research project, and I require a more formal paper than they have done so far. I use it as a building tool for their final argument paper.

October 6

This class period was terrific. I'm so pleased that everything coordinated well.

This class works best in groups. They discover, dissect, uncover, and discuss all the material and report back to the class as a whole. I'm impressed with their insight and willingness to handle difficult essays. Because they work best in a group collaborative format, I'm going to rework some of my future assignments. I hope this will result in a successful IQP.

I set up a chart on the blackboard for the Smitherman, Jones, Mellix and Simon essays. They were to analyze the essays according to language and culture, context, power, then discuss the essays according to purpose and audience. The groups took one essay each. I walked around the room listening to comments and answering any questions. The students rarely strayed from the topic, and their discussions were lively (for an 8am class).

When the groups reported their information, they were incredibly perceptive. I wrote on the board their analysis while they took notes from each other's comments. It was exciting for me to see the students accept each other's comments as valid and worthy of noting down.

Tony brought up the idea of "proper" English, and I asked him what proper English was. The class discussed the issues and agreed that students can travel between SE/WE and BE or their own dialect. They saw language in context.

These essays were challenging, and the students met the challenge. I constantly think about the stereotypes of community college students which frustrate me. They can handle challenging material and on their own.

The next step, I assigned a short paper to take the material they analyzed and apply it to Rodriguez's or Villanueva's essays. I asked them to choose one. I'm looking forward to seeing the results.

Marie brought up the use of the "n" word. It created an interesting discussion. I, however, felt uncomfortable. Here I am a white, upper-middle class suburban mom/educator trying/attempting to lead a discussion about a racial slur that has even divided the country (Simpson trial). Fortunately, two African-American students readily offered their opinions (Alex and Tony), and I stepped back to let the discussion proceed. The two young men offered thoughtful comments about how African-Americans view the word – Alex said no self-respecting black would use it, kidding or not kidding.

Class time ended, and I stated that we could discuss the word later when we cover the topics of sexist, derogatory language.

October 11

Rodriguez and Villanueva's essays touched many of my students. I think they wanted to agree with Rodriguez, perhaps because they thought it was the more "correct" for the classroom. Students often try to "read" what they think a teacher wants. However, as they began to speak they realized they were agreeing more with Villanueva.

Interesting reaction. I drew a chart on the board to compare/contrast. I asked my students to listen to the article I read about the judge in Texas who "ordered" a mother to speak English to her child. Well...they all rebelled against that idea entirely. They want to "own" some language, their native tongue or familiar dialect. They enjoy a private language with friends and family.

Their essays tended to be more summaries than analysis. One or two wrote good analysis. Celine I'm happy to say wrote a good paper, and she criticized several of Rodriguez's points. This was better writing than her past essays.

The journal question about language and pain always opens wounds for one or two of my students. Gary wrote about being Hispanic, and he called himself a "faggot." He revealed that his light skin and public manner belie his true "self." Most people do not realize these two personal traits. He had me; I'm one of those people. I don't care about a person's sexual preference, and I

don't even try to guess, but do I assume that every student is heterosexual? No. Because I try to teach tolerance and diversity and respect for all life styles.

This question may be cathartic for some students. Many non-native students write about difficult situations where language was used to belittle or confuse them.

October 13

Sexist language is the topic for the first part of class. We discussed the three essays together since they basically had the same theme. We discussed the word "bitch" and how women use it and how men use it. Which gender can use the word/own it? Many students agreed that they didn't like the word at all. They thought it had a pejorative connotation for women. Maybe they said this because I was standing in front of the classroom.

Actually, the discussion was quiet, and students were not very interested in what they were reading. I think. I may drop this section next semester. The book offers many more interesting topics to explore. Perhaps they are tired with the topic of language per se.

After grading their Rodriguez/Villanueva papers, I noticed some interesting writing approaches: 1 - several students summarized the essay with little or no analysis. These student depended on the essay entirely for commentary. Their

own voices were absent. 2- Some students did creative analysis of either paper. Most who did attempt analysis did so with Rodriguez. 3 - Most non-native students responded to the essays with personal experiences. Many drew a direct correlation between their own experiences, learning English with either Rodriguez Villanueva. All of these students agreed that they need to know English to work and attend higher education. They feel English is the ticket to a better future here.

If they all agree on this – is this something that cannot be ignored in my dissertation.

October 16

The Million Man March occurred today, and this event affected my students' attendance. A few students told me that they were required to arrive at work earlier; therefore, they would miss class. Some students may have attended the march, others may have slept in.

On Friday, I did explain that attendance in class was optional today because I understood that for personal, political or economic reasons they may be involved with the march.

So, those who attended class broke into their IQP groups to review each other's research for Friday's project. They seemed frustrated that some members

of their group failed to do the research. Many of the students questioned the grading procedure because of other group member's lack of work. They are learning that collaborative work is dependent as well as an independent process. Some spoke to each other in harsh tones, revealing their anger.

Meanwhile, I spoke to Merhdad after class and told him to withdraw without a grade penalty. He was absent Friday and called me at home that afternoon. Also all of his work was at least one or two weeks late. Not one assignment was handed in on time. I told him Friday that 7 absences in the first six weeks of class was over the limit of five for the semester. He tried to convince me that I ought to give him another chance.

Talk about language usage, he constantly referred to me as "Madame" throughout the conversation.

Friday afternoon I told him that I would talk to the head of the English department, but my rule still stood.

After class I told Merhdad my decision about his options: 1- to withdraw w/o a grade penalty or 2 - have a failure on his record. Naturally, he was upset. He believed he deserved another chance, I said that I had already given him many chances. He said his life was experiencing difficulties. I responded that with his personal problems perhaps he should not be taking on added stress of college courses. He stated he was doing fine in his other course. I replied,

"Then, concentrate on that course." I continued that perhaps one course is all he could handle this semester.

October 18

Today, I reviewed a works cited page for the IQP project. After reminding them that they have a list of some individual goals from their past papers, I asked students what goals they will work on when writing up the project. They stated vocabulary, punctuation, flow, fragments. I reminded them to avoid beginning their sentences with "it is" or " there is" – a crutch this class uses to begin their sentences.

Later, students met in their individual groups to work on their projects. Their group activity is lively, and they appear to be helping each other. I wonder if this is all working. Are they being social or are they working on the project?

Working on the project seems to be a problem when all of the members are not present. A few students are arriving 10-15 minutes late. They miss introductory remarks, and their arrival interrupts the person speaking. Also the students wonder about who is going to come to class, who is going to be late and who is going to be absent. On one level they are beginning to understand the important of collaborative work. On another level, they are experiencing the same frustrations I am about students missing something important.

So...midway through class, while they were in groups, I said that they must be aware that all late work was due today, that I count absences and that they need to be more conscientious about arriving on time. I explained that I did ask a student to leave the class because of the number of his absences and his late work. They all knew whom I was talking about and understood the situation.

A few students called me at home concerned about their absences and late work. Janeth called several times. She always seems concerned about what is due, and the date a paper is due, but her work is continually late by two or three days.

Tony called and said he was sick but did his share of the IQP. I told him fine, but call your group members and explain it to them. That's where his responsibility lies right now. He said he would.

October 20

Presentations on IQP began today. Students were reluctant to be the first group. I placed desks at the front of the classroom for the groups to sit and present their work. I sat at the rear of the classroom.

The first group to speak was the "immigration" group. This is also the group which is most comprised of world majority students. They were nervous

and intimidated by the positioning of the desks. However, they all came up and presented their material well.

I observed the rest of the class as the first group spoke. They were listening carefully. Either they were nervous about their own report, or they were paying close attention to the non-native students. These speakers were clear and deliberate in their speech, especially Linh; they did not read their papers but spoke from their papers. The rest of the class showed respect and attention. I was pleased with both the speakers' and the listeners' efforts.

The censorship group came up next. Three students were able to speak because of time constraints; the rest will continue on Monday.

Alex, who has only spoken up in class one or two times, read his report. He was anxious but I keep telling him, he has talent and skills, and I truly want him to work harder. I'm trying to approach him with care; there seems to be a balance for community college instructors. We have the opportunity to better know our students and we want to encourage them. We give them as much private attention as possible, but they're also adults, and we need to respect their decisions and actions.

October 23

Two groups gave their presentations today. Censorship completed their work, and welfare reform did their's in entirety.

The welfare group has been the best by far. Their work seemed to include more in-depth research (for a short research project), and they seem to have actually worked interdependently. Some of the others seem to have independent essays on the same topic. Although the topic was broken down into manageable parts, the other groups presented papers that had little "flow" or connection to what the other members of the group were doing.

Students did pay attention to their classmates. One or two did ask questions, but they required short answers from the participants. Therefore, not much class discussion occurred.

Toward the end of class, I handed out the definition assignment and the "pornography/censorship" reading assignment. I want students to carefully look at the definition of pornography. Perhaps they can do this as a group?

I find that I am being lax in writing my journal entries right away. I think its because I do not have a place to go to after class. Because the "lecturer's" desk went back to a full-time faculty member, I feel out of place and out of touch. I enjoy having a desk to sit at for 30-49 minutes after class to prepare my journal, or meet with students, or rework an assignment. Therefore, I have to wait until I

arrive home to write down my recollections about the class period. Naturally, other responsibilities interfere, phone rings, daughters need attention, groceries, laundry, etc.

October 25

Students were ready to move on from the IQP, but we still had one more group to hear. Therefore, I had the group speak at the middle of the class time.

I wanted to go over the definition essay project. This has been a successful writing session for most students in the past. We reviewed the assignment sheet which includes the various types of definitions. Then each student pulled out their xerox copy of the *OED* definition of their chosen word. We read over the various elements of an *OED* definition. Students were very interested in this information. Many asked if they could look up the word in other dictionaries to compare the meaning to the *OED*.

Following this discussion, the computer group presented their papers to the class. The number in the group dwindled down. Two students dropped the course.

This is the first paper Matt has written all semester. He read it to the class rather than talked from it. It was one of the few times Matt has spoken in class.

It was good to hear his voice, he seemed a little nervous at first, but he relaxed and presented well. But he still hasn't done any of the past work. I don't know why he stays. I know he works at Pier One in Old Town Alexandria. He's a stock boy there, and he helped me with an item I bought there. I want to talk to him. I'll set up a conference next week. I want to read his report first.

After the report, we began discussing Steinem's essay on pornography. I asked students to write down their own definition of pornography. We wrote some of the definitions on the board: "Pictures of naked people." "In the eye of the beholder." "Something the right doesn't want us to see." "Anything that has to do with masturbation."

The class period ended so I said we would discuss the rest of the essays Friday. This should be an interesting discussion!

October 27

Today, I think I made a mistake, and I've been thinking about it.

First, we reviewed the definition paper assignment. Students wanted to go over again their individual definitions from the *OED*. We talked about cultural vs. stipulative definitions. They also worried about including the etymology into the format of their letter/paper. I explained how students have done this in the past. They accepted this explanation.

Second, I then tried to offer encouraging words. I said they were a bright class and each student has written at least one paper which demonstrated strong skills. I said they all are capable of successfully completing the semester.

But then a problem occurred. I noticed, along with the students, that Alex was dosing off. He would fall asleep. This is not the first time he has drifted off in class. I invited him up to he front of the class with me. I said, "Alex, you're taller than I am, right?" "Yes" "Look around the room. They are all sitting, so you – and I – can see what's going on. I'm standing, and I can even see if each student has a draft of their paper on their desk." Alex agreed that the view of the classroom and the desks was clear.

As he stood next to me, I told the students that I respect the fact that each one of them has a very busy life. I asked "How many of you have jobs?" Each student raised his/her hand. Then I asked "How many have a family, that they are responsible for?" Several students raised their hands.

I explained my admiration for community college students because a majority of them have so many responsibilities, yet they do come to class and they do their assignments. Alex explained that he comes to class from a job. So does Tony. I praised their determination to arrive at class.

These students – the Alexes and the Tonys – have so many other outside responsibilities and difficulties – their presence needs to be recognized. More

and more two and four-year students are facing the challenges of class attendance, performance along with jobs and family responsibilities. I worry about these students. I admire those who actually finish my class successfully. The constant writing and reading assignments demand time and energy from students who already have enormous responsibilities.

Did I do wrong by having Alex come up front? I tried like crazy to explain to the whole class my "view from the front."

October 30

I'm not sure it was a mistake. Alex arrived seven minutes before class ended. No books. No definition paper which was due today. Nothing. Sometimes this whole process can be discouraging. I spoke with him after class. I told him that I had faith in his talents, and I knew he could successfully complete the work, but he now has more than five absences, and he has to decide if he needs to take a "W" without grade penalty. I reminded him this was his decision. He could call me at home if he wished. He said that he comes from three different areas to make class, Potomac, MD, DC and VA. He knew an 8am class would be difficult. Frustrated, I just said for him to decide.

We had a lively discussion about Steinem's essay on pornography and erotica. We included Jacoby's first amendment essay with Steinem's. Students

offered their own opinions about what they view as pornography. I asked them to check the essays for the author's definitions of pornography and erotica. We saw how Steinem defines then connects her ideas about porn to the dictionary definition.

Interestingly, mostly the male students discussed the essay. Buffy and Christina – two who usually offered thoughtful comments – participated. I'm pleased that students challenged each other's opinions.

But! Few students knew who Gloria Steinem was! One student – Marie knew she was a Playboy bunny at one time. They figured out she is a feminist, but no one knew her history. Either Gloria needs a new agent, or I'm getting real old.

November 1

Huck Finn always proves to be a good conversation starter. We reviewed the two opposing essays – Wallace and Nadeau – on having Huck Finn taught in the middle or elementary schools. Several students have been assigned the book when they were young.

With the topic on the table the debate ensued:

Tony said he read it in the 8th grade in a majority black class. At the time, students did not use the "n" word and felt it was demeaning. He added that they

read sections of the book aloud and every time the "n" word was stated the students would voice their discomfort.

Jason read the book on his own as an action/adventure book. He didn't realize the problem when he was in the fourth grade.

Eileen read the book in a college course, and she stated that they debated the book's value for weeks.

Steve said he read it in high school and had no problem with the book. His next few comments began a very lively debate for the whole class. He said that comments and name-calling only affected those who are racist themselves. Those who took offense were the ones with the problem. He didn't care what people called him.

Well...many students responded loudly, but some remained quiet. Did they feel silenced?

Buffy, thankfully, brought up several important points: the vulnerability of young students and the authority of the teacher who required students to read the book for assignment or aloud. Bless her, we've been discussing authority/power during the semester. Many students began to agree with her.

Vickkas who has rarely spoken in class offered many worthwhile comments today. I was happy to hear his comments and asked him to elaborate several times so the whole class could benefit from his observations.

November 3

Collaborative/group learning has become an important issue for me. After reading Bruffee's text and taking Gail's class, I have become a convert. This group of students responds well to the collaborative process.

Therefore, rather than standing up and me leading the discussion about MLK's essay, I decided to have them do the investigative work. They are in 5 groups with each group doing a close reading of 10 paragraphs in the essay. They have three questions to answer. I have given them the class period to do the investigation. They are to report to the whole class on Monday. Each group has a recorder of information. I do not want to review their material.

8:30am: Alex has not arrived yet. I'm beginning to resent his actions. I'm trying to be understanding and/or supportive but I feel as though he is pushing me to the edge. How do I encourage a bright, African-American male to stay with me to the end of the semester? The more experienced community college teacher/instructor here will think I'm idealistic.

What are my responsibilities on this issue? I've read very few journal essays on this topic. Most two-year college educators accept this as a way of life. I feel challenged by this issue, but I know I can't "save/keep" everyone. I wonder if Gail can help me on this issue, maybe I will e-mail her.

I plan to set up conferences with my students in the next week or so. I want to talk to them individually. Not many have come to see me this semester. Usually, I spend time with students after class for an extended period of time.

Jason is entertaining his group rather than preparing the assignment. I decided to get up and ask each group if they had any questions. I let some groups know/see my frustration that they haven't done what I asked. Now I wonder how much collaborative work is too much? Do students, especially at the lower division, become bored/lose interest in the process?

November 6

I knew that Diane Dailey, a long time full-time instructor at Alex/NOVA, would come to observe my performance today.

I prepared the class for this visit on Friday. First, I told them that a visitor was going to come to class to watch me. Of course, they understood that their actions would influence my evaluation.

Then I planned Friday's group work to prepare the class for today's presentation. They were ready and cooperative. The students often kept one eye on Ms. Dailey and one eye on me. I'm sure they are fascinated with the idea that I am the one who was being "graded." I wonder what goes through their minds.

My teacher has to account to someone else. Even she is accountable. Little do they know the perils of adjunct faculty.

The class did go well. I drew a chart on the board. Each group offered their prepared answers for each category. I'm not sure they understood that they were doing a close reading of MLK's work. Once again, they brought up the finer points of the work. Their group efforts drove the group toward statements/ answers/analysis that matches any commentary in a teacher's manual or critical review.

Bruffee/Peck and Flowers are correct when they state that the group collaborative dynamic helps each member develop critical thinking/writing skills. The challenges were heartening to observe. Michael and Lorena V. disagreed on a particular issue. I asked them to find support in the text for their individual answers. Competitive performance may have been the motive because active argument with supporting examples from the text ensued. I stood back and watched the action.

Are adult students more agreeable to do collaborative work? Are they more sympathetic to my situation as an adjunct faculty member going through evaluation?

The debate included other students. I was beaming. Diane enjoyed the activity. Students interrupted each other, questioned, and then answered each other. Dynamic. She left after the MLK discussion.

November 8

I know that I had neglected the "writing process" for a while. Students were making the same mistakes over and over again. I want them to be aware of their individual writing styles. What do they do well? Where do they think they need improvement? After grading their definition papers, I decided to have them investigate their own work in a journal-like entry.

The comments in class were much different. The students were first reticent to expose their individual problems in front of others. But as the minutes wore on, the class became more comfortable with discussing writing "problems." They began to laugh and joke about the perils of the semicolon or sentence fragments. The quotation marks and colons and commas were other areas they joked about. They tried to devise ways which would "break the rules" in outrageous ways. "Suppose you had this in a sentence..." They offered challenging, sometimes humorous examples.

I went to Gail Kettlewell's class and had learned an idea for my comp class. Creative "sketching." I remember doing this in Don Gallehr's class at

GMU in which we sketched scenes from *Like Water for Chocolate* as a group activity. I'm going to turn it into an individual activity for this weekend on Orwell's "A Hanging." The sketch will be a scene from the short story, and I will ask them to relate the scene to the idea of capital punishment. Hope it works.

November 10

I visited Diane Dailey's class today. I asked my class to fill out the dissertation contract and survey.

I then left the students to work on the survey with their textbook, *Bedford*, and went to Dailey's class to observe. Dailey teaches a 111-009 class which is a group of students who straddle the ESL/Developmental classes and Comp 111. She offered a copy of her syllabus and I reviewed it.

Dailey's class is in Room 106 a large room with several rows of desks. Two large blackboards line the walls. I have taught in this room. About 28 students sat in desks which were lined up in neat rows. She sat at the front of the class on a stool in front of a desk which had a lectern sitting on it. Dailey's book was placed on the lectern, and she sat and addressed the students.

The students were from diverse backgrounds. In addition, many were non-native English speakers. They appeared to be older than my students, generally.

Diane spoke clearly and deliberately to her students. They understood her questions and remarks. Her soft, gentle manner was apparent. None of the students asked her to repeat her questions or comments. She never "talked-down" to her students. She treated them with respect and deference.

They covered the initial areas of an argument paper, something I plan to do next week. She was primarily using the *Bedford* as the class' reference point. They were discussing a sample students in the book. Then they used the students supporting evidence as points of discussion in class.

Many students offered comments. Diane called on them to speak, and each waited for the other to offer their comments. The overall atmosphere was quiet, respectful, and intelligent. I appreciate viewing another instructor's class. I can't say that Diane's style is any better – or worse? – than mine. I respect any instructor whose style demonstrates concern and enthusiasm for his/her students. I would not/do not follow Diane's style, but I don't criticize it. Her students willingly responded, they disagreed with each other, but listened to each other. Perhaps that is what Diane's best lesson was – to learn how to listen.

November 13

I handed back their affirmative action response papers which were disappointing. I gave anyone with less than a "C" an option to rewrite the paper.

After this we discussed the issues of affirmative action. Marie's first comments bordered on racism, and I carefully cut her off. The students were already sensitive about their grades; they just wanted to understand the issue better. They raised their eyes to the ceiling, annoyed, wanting to push on. I asked Alex and Rebecca to share their papers with classmates. They agreed.

This morning, and tomorrow I have conferences with each of my students. The notes are on their index cards. Matt, Pat, and Janeth did not show. Matt and Pat have not come to class since then. Janeth showed up two classes later.

November 15

Frustration has turned to anger. Three students who were doing poorly – actually not doing any work – skipped their conferences with me. Janeth wrote a letter with the same immature excuses she has used all semester. Matt and Pat showed up for most of the classes – each has about 5 absences – but they do none of the work. I had intended to ask them why.

I assigned an in-class essay for today which equals a test grade. They were allowed to bring their books, notes to do the assignment.

Most of the instructors at NOVA/Alex assign in-class essays to see if the students truly write their own papers. Some teachers suspect that others are helping the students prepare their papers outside of class.

Why do I assign this? I'm not sure. One reason is practice for the upcoming final exams which will include essay questions. Maybe, I too suspect one or two students. Rebecca writes clear, concise essays for take-home assignments, but her drafts and class participation don't follow this pattern. Most other students have been consistent in their writings. Journals, question sheets and essays display the same diction, syntax and grammar problems.

November 17

From now until the end of the semester we will review the argument section of the course. I handed out a typed packet I prepared last year. This time, I included an outline format which I found in *TETYC*. I'm hoping the outline will help these students organize their work. I want them to visualize what is required of them. The chart is specific, and the students seem to appreciate this chart.

I spoke to Janeth after class and explained my frustration with her behavior. She nods and says, "I know it's not your fault, Mrs. Salmon." She misses class continually and each assignment has been late at least one week, journal and

question sheets included. She has not done some of the more formal writings at all. After discussing where she stands, Janeth asked if she should sign up for English 111 again next semester. "Absolutely," I said. I told her there is no way she can pass the class at this time.

At what point do I put aside stories about her personal life and her excuses? I have been as flexible as possible. I know that I have allowed her to make up work since the beginning of the semester. Have I been encouraging/enabling this behavior? Community college books/essays encourage a special understanding of the community college student. I agree, but a line needs to be drawn. I'm now drawing that line with Janeth – and Matt and Pat.

November 20

The number of students in the class has dwindled down. Approximately five students no longer come to class. This has been a common experience in the two-year school. Exams, final papers, and making up late work seem to overwhelm the less conscientious students. They do not come to class and take the "F" on their final grade. For some reason there are a few studies on this particular community college problem. It requires interviewing students who have left the system. They may be difficult. How does an instructor motivate every student in

the class? Is this an unrealistic goal? Normally, my classes begin with 25-27 students. By the end of the semester, I have 19-20 left.

I asked the students to explain their argument topics to the class. Each student reviewed his/her idea. Several had "non-argument" topics and the class helped them fine tune these topics. Linh though had a different problem. She said she was going to write about how family members argue. Many students raised their eyebrows. Christina explained that this is not a paper on explaining argument, but on an issue that is arguable. Linh (from Vietnam) has misinterpreted several class assignments. For each of the assignments I give each student a typed handout on the subject area. Argument is a five page handout. Linh misreads many of these assignments. Vietnamese is her first language, and I think she has difficulty with translating abstract ideas.

Gary, who told me earlier that he wanted to write on gay rights issues, preferred that he didn't explain his topic to the class. He just said that he was investigating the topic we talked about earlier. I said fine and moved on. Obviously, he did not want to approach the issue in public.

I talked with Ellen about my accumulation of 27 credits and a possible increase in pay next semester. She said it required paper work that Paul McVeigh (head of humanities) needs to implement. Now, I have to work up the nerve to

talk with him. But I will, because I have to promote myself, no one else will do it.

The remainder of the semester will be a challenge to have the students view the argument paper as a process, not as a last minute product for our composition class. I am most concerned about students who waiver on their topics at this time. They usually let things slide for a while and then do the paper – if they do the paper at all – in a last minute rush. Linh worried me, and so does Alex. Their topics were fuzzy. Tony's technology in the workplace paper sounds more like a research paper.

November 27

We are "in the home stretch." Students were assigned to bring in their research work for the final paper. Three students now have no topic. Therefore, they have no research. I told Jason, Tony, and Alice that they must bring in topic and research on Wednesday.

I explained to the class that for the next four class sessions they are to bring in all of their work on the argument paper because they will have time to work on the material in class. I stressed the process of writing the paper – thinking, preparing, researching – all that goes on before they even sit down to write a draft.

I plan to use some of Bruffee's suggestions in our peer review sessions this and next week. His chapter on writing collaboratively is helpful.

At the beginning of the class, I reviewed the MLA cite formats. In addition, I reviewed the typing of the paper and how the paper needs to look visually. I tried to cover the material carefully. In the past many students have had difficulty using this format. I told them keep their *Bedford* close at hand to use as a reference in the areas of typing format, works cited page, and plagiarism.

I explained the delicate balance of incorporating quotes into the body of their work, and they need to understand the meaning of the quote they use in their papers. I explained that all of us students have difficulty with these two areas – including me.

I wonder if I should bring one of my papers as a reference, so they can see what a final paper looks like? I want to think about this...Does it reveal too much of myself to them?

November 28

Students are still asking questions about their topics. Should I change it? Should I move into another direction? The positive issue is that these students are asking questions. The students are not passive. They want to know more about their issues. They ask me and the entire class for ideas.

Celine brought in a *Wall Street Journal* article on welfare because she knew someone in the class was writing about the issue. Buffy was – and she reviewed the article. She stated that she though the statistics were skewered toward the conservative side. She indicated that the other stats she had did not match those in the *WSJ*. She's investigating and thinking.

Celine said she needed to change her topic. Actually she called me at home to discuss this. She's switching from freedom of speech and the KKK to chemical warfare. She found more interesting material.

After class, I was working in the English office. Janeth came to see me. She has not attended class since we had our discussion a few days ago. She said that she spoke to the counselor and he advised her to audit the remaining portion of the semester. She asked if that was possible, and I said certainly. I think she was surprised at my quick, positive response.

Met with Dulce this afternoon. We agreed that Bruffee was an excellent resource for my work. She feels that she too is a follower of his methods and that his social constructionist view was particularly relevant to community college students. She encouraged me to read those critics who disagree with Bruffee.

December 1

Most students did bring in their first drafts today. One or two did not, which is still a pretty good turnout. I followed a suggestion from Bruffee's book on collaboration, a suggestion which made sense, one I had not used before today. I had the students set off in pairs and told them to read their drafts aloud to each other. For today's round I let them work with people they felt most comfortable. I said the only requirement of the listener is to determine if he/she could recognize a clear thesis.

The students clearly enjoyed this exercise. The readers often stopped and said to the listener, "Wait, this doesn't make sense." or "Oh, I need to fix this paragraph." Besides recognizing the reader' thesis statement, the listeners readily offered suggestions. They took their jobs as listeners seriously.

The classroom was full of individual conversations. I walked around – asking if anyone had a question/problem to solve.

I think I will carry this exercise into the next two class meetings and have students read to a new listener each time. The drawback I noticed was that the two Vietnamese female students tend to cling to each other, and they definitely need native speakers to hear their essays. Both students have trouble with idioms. They will benefit from a new listener's view.

I know that many instructors implement creative techniques for their students' education. When I do so I am always excited and proud that my newly found idea works. I am finally realizing that "theory" can offer practical solutions to those of us who practice. Most of the theorists that I have encountered do have teaching positions which influence their work. If they are good theorists, then they cannot ignore what their students are teaching *them*.

I was initially skeptical of theorists, but after a closer investigation, I must admit I was the one who was impatient. I want concrete answers, suggestions. Now, I admit I need to read, review and digest the theory before I come up with concrete answers on my own.

But, I do find myself more comfortable with composition theorists who either teach at open admissions institutions or theorists with community college experience. Their knowledge areas resemble my situation at NOVA.

Janeth has not come to class to "audit." I have not seen her since the morning she came in to ask me if she may audit.

December 4

The students are excited that they are near the end. Many feel a true sense of accomplishment. Some did bring in mock up "works cited" sheets. Others brought in "problems" with items they want to place on their works cited page.

Students offered each other suggestions. For the bulk of the class time, they cleaned up or wrote out cites.

Initially, we discussed the issue of information from the Internet. We talked about people using Internet information as their own without citing it. I told them this was a big "no-no." We created a cite format together and we remembered that the author of the work must be included. I should check the new edition of MLA to see if they deal with this problem.

The bigger issue is: how reliable is this source from the Internet? Many of my students are relying on this source. Perhaps I need to look for articles on this issue.

I'm truly pleased that these students are on schedule with their argument paper work. I rearranged the syllabus this semester to devote more time to this segment. Students are responding better than others have in the past.

Tony asked how long I have been teaching. I told him this was my sixth year at NOVA as an adjunct. He said his boss graduated from here, and she had a teacher "who was short and had the greenest eyes." Well...that could have been me. Tony told me the woman's married name. I did not recognize it.

Gary walked out with me at the end of class and said that he really enjoyed the writing assignments. Many of my students asked me if I would be

teaching English 112, the literature course, next semester; they wanted to sign up with me. I told them that I want to keep teaching composition, until I get it right.

I think I am improving. I'm learning so much from my GMU courses and I am incorporating ideas, techniques. They are making my job more enjoyable, and I feel I have a deeper understanding of my students.

December 6

Today, class looked like a free-for-all. I answered questions on last-minute problems. The students spent most of their time reading and working together.

I am almost finished with them. I care for this class very much. I feel that we have created a true writing community; they will benefit from this community in their educational careers, and even possibly in their jobs.

I did speak with Paul about an increase in my salary next semester. He said he would look into it. And I mentioned that eventually I would like a full-time job. We joked that I have to wait until someone dies or retires, but he was supportive. I did overhear two full-time instructors from another department talk about how they were going to put off retirement, because this was the best teaching job – or any job there is. Great. I'll be waiting forever.

Learning Standard English: Public vs. Private Language

For years composition critics have been debating the value of teaching standard English in the writing classroom. Several critics considered the inclusion of the rules of grammar and standard English to be oppressive and a force to silence the voices of students. Other critics contend that learning standard English allows students to enter the worlds of scholarship and commerce, and students need the proper tools of language to participate successfully in the American economy. After reviewing these critics, I suggest that as with most generalizations, a grain of truth can be found in each argument. My own students taught me that they need to learn the language conventions of the academy and the economy – public discourse. Yet, they do not allow these conventions the latitude to silence nor eliminate their private voices. These students can – and do – learn academic language without denying their own individuality and creativity.

In the community college classroom, the issues of teaching or not teaching grammar are similar to those faced in a four-year college or university. However, many community college students have experienced the power of America's capitalistic society, and realize that a knowledge of standard English is necessary and expected in the workplace. One of my students, Linda, mentions that as a

secretary she is expected to write letters and memoranda for her supervisor. She is startled at the notion that composition critics argue about the value of teaching standard English. She believes that she could not keep her job is she did not have a knowledge of standard English. Another student, Flavio, tells the class that for his application for a job at J.C. Penney's he was required to write a short essay on "customer service." He contends that the hiring supervisor wanted to make sure that the employees knew how to articulate in an intelligent manner, and that the potential employee understands the importance of serving the customer. George serves as a union representative for his co-workers, and his responsibility is to write up grievance reports. He asserts that if he does not write up the report in a formal manner, then he is not serving his co-workers properly.

Certainly, these students are in non-professional positions. Yet, they want and perhaps are required to demonstrate to their co-workers and supervisors that they, too, have ownership of standard English. Therefore, they attend community college which "is the quintessential open-door institution, and the proliferation of opportunities for ... attendance at any point in the life cycle has powerfully reinforced that belief that it is never too late for individual talent to reveal itself – and be rewarded"(Brint and Karabel 223). Many of these students "are highly motivated and able individuals – among them, workers, immigrants, minorities, and women," and the absence of the community college would leave a serious

gap in American academic institutions and commerce(Brint and Karabel 226). These student desire the tools necessary to become members of American society, and they expect the community college to offer exactly what they need.

Learning standard English through a writing handbook takes on a significant role in freshman English in the community college. The handbook is a guide into the language of the marketplace; it is a guide for those who want to further their academic careers. As indicated later in this chapter, my students rely on the writing handbook not only for freshman composition but for other academic courses as well. Furthermore, many composition handbooks have changed, demonstrating the fluidity and flexibility of American discourse. In the community college composition classroom the writing handbook can be a relevant and accessible tool for students learning the conventions of standard English. If I use the handbook as a way of discovering, developing and disclosing individual voices in my classroom, I serve my students well. In this manner, the handbook and its contents do not serve as a tool of oppression, but as a tool for self-determination.

The Writing Handbook: A Guide

In his text, *Fragments of Rationality*, Lester Faigley equates writing handbooks with other tools of the powerful capitalists to force the lower classes into

submission. He remarks, "One approach to relating the discourse of textbooks to larger social, economic and political structures is through the analysis of ideologies inherent in the language of textbooks"(138). These textbooks are "subjected to the laws of the marketplace and therefore obedient to authority"(138). Furthermore, Faigley agrees somewhat with Richard Ohmann when he suggests "that they [textbooks] are also embedded in a long history of institutional practices and discourses that...are themselves mechanisms of power working quietly across social hierarchies and traditional political categories"(133). Many current composition theorists, Faigley included, question the use of writing handbooks in the classroom. They wonder if the books are promoting the status quo in American society's discourse, and are used by the teachers – either consciously or unconsciously – to continue limiting student's voices in the future.

In his chapter "The Conflicting Rhetoric of Writing Textbooks," Faigley criticizes two well-known writing handbooks: McCrimmon's *Writing with a Purpose,* and Axelrod and Cooper's *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing.* Both texts fail Faigley's litmus text of what constitutes a good writing handbook. When reviewing McCrimmon's work in depth, he quotes from the first edition of the work which reflects the educational and social goals of the 1950's. Faigley states that the first edition contains "no appeals to the value of writing ability in subsequent college courses or in future careers. McCrimmon assumes that students

know why introductory composition is required"(147). The postmodern critic then relies upon a golf analogy McCrimmon employed, then upon a quote about the use of nonstandard English, then upon a quote about the speech habits of the favored social class. Hindsight is certainly 20/20, and Faigley's comments about past problems in the field of composition reflect this hindsight.

Later, in the chapter Faigley offers a cursory review of the subsequent editions of McCrimmon's work, and reminds the reader that although various improvements have been made in later editions, they still "return to status"(146). The publishers, according to Faigley, "are reluctant to change radically the content of its best-selling book," which mixes a little of the new composition theories with the old(148). As the chapter continues, Faigley analyzes the pitfalls of *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing*, noting its economic value as a best-selling handbook as a guide for students "to earn better"(157). He wonders about the goals of this handbook, concerned that it relies oppressively on the "presentation of the self as a reasonable, authoritative, and objective. Textual coherence is privileged because it reduces conflict to a matter of textual tensions"(162).

Yet, texts are often used as a *guide*, not as a monolith for writing instruction. Faigley ignores the practical pedagogical aspects of the composition process. Most conscientious instructors in higher education do not rely solely upon one text in their classroom. The class and the teacher are in a dynamic, constantly

fluctuating through processes of learning how to compose various types of writing venues. Therefore, the handbook is only one reference tool among many used in the course.

Sharon Zuber and Ann M. Reed recognize the use of the writing textbook as a reference tool and discuss the progress of composition handbooks in various areas of writing. The authors note that the instructor is perhaps the most influential element in the classroom, and how that instructor behaves as "gatekeeper" of acceptable language and writing affects the composition process(515). They agree that open admissions policies in higher education are reflected in "the frequency of handbook revisions [and] the conflict between forces for language change and the tradition of authority"(517). For Zuber and Reed, the handbook is responsive "to language practice...[and] are not bibles. They contain rules that should be responsive to the variety and growth in a language"(527).

Community college students and educators can participate in these debates about this variety and growth of language. Their inclusion is a valuable asset to all participants of the discussion. The innovative teaching techniques that community college instructors are noted for demonstrate that the writing handbook is a map, a means of navigating the various codes of standard English. In the community college classroom language differences are discussed. The student-writer is the subject of the classroom, not monolithic rules about grammar

and mechanics. Students are encouraged to discover themselves as students, then to discover themselves as writers.

John Dawkins, a community college instructor at two schools in Pennsylvania, believes that "handbooks and style manuals are not sacred texts for a great many good writers"(533). He demonstrates to his students that writing often demands flexibility. Offering examples of prominent writers who flaunt the rules of punctuation, Dawkins contends that an either/or attitude about composition rules stifles the writer. His essay presents several charts and tables which break down the function of punctuation marks. He illustrates a "hierarchy of functional punctuation marks," patterns and rules from which a writer can determine the appropriate function for what and how he wants to communicate. His goal is to encourage students to clarify the meaning of sentences and to gain "intended emphasis(534)." Although he often dismisses the writing handbooks' monolithic attitude toward punctuation, Dawkins does depend on traditional forms of punctuation to create his own system. The point is not that a handbook is used or not used in the classroom, nor is it that standard English is the tradition behind his work. Dawkins took the time to analyze the structure of punctuation as viewed in the handbook, constructed a reasonable pedagogical method for his students, and then shared his work with his peers through his article in *College*

Composition and Communication. All of these audiences share in Dawkins' work, and witness the flexibility of standard English.

The composition handbook offers structure to the writing process, explanations of the types of writings, and examples of writings so that the student can become aware of where he needs to improve individually. The text serves as a road map for these students. Certainly, strict reliance on the text could lead to a hegemonic atmosphere. I often supplement our text with outside writings by a variety of authors, including student authors. Students who witness the variations in author's voices within academic writing are encouraged to develop their own voices within this parameter.

Because many community college students depend upon the usefulness and importance of the writing handbook, they welcome the rules of grammar, the discussions about the types of composition, the examples of student and professional essays. These are students, like Victor Villaneuva, who now realize that they need – and desire – an educational foundation beyond their high school diploma. They are more willing participants in the classroom, because their experiences in "the real world" have demonstrated this need. Villaneuva wanted to "move on, away from the Army," and he wanted the chance "to go beyond the GED" because he was told long ago that college wasn't [his] lot"(66). Looking for a viable, affordable educational opportunity, Villaneuva enrolled in a two-year

college in Washington. He clearly states what many community college students believe, "if he failed, there would be nothing lost...if he succeeded, an Associate degree in something. He'd be better equipped to brace the job market again"(67). The road to becoming "Professor" Villaneuva was an arduous one, and it did begin at a community college.

In the conclusion of his text, *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*, Villaneuva warns educators and critics about suppressing the multiple voices of their students. Although they speak differently, they "are to be legitimated"(140). Legitimated, yes, but students deserve to know, to understand, and to master the language of standard English. Donald Lazere expresses his concern with critics who argue against the "back-to-basics movement on the grounds that these forces have intentionally or inadvertently served conservative hegemonic interests against aspirations to equality by minorities, women, and the working class"(7). Why teach students the language of the powerful? Why impose standard English on the lower classes? Why teach them academic discourse? Viewing school as a socializing and homogenizing tool which makes students docile insults the students. It dismisses their cultural heritage. Community college students represent the broad spectrum of American society, and they recognize the challenge of learning the language of the professional class while maintaining their own self worth. For example, Buffy (Spring 1995) worried that

she did not have the ability to write a college paper. Yet, her essays about the difficulties of working and studying, combined with being a single mother, exhibited a writer's ability to integrate her own voice within an academic paper.

Buffy and other community college students come to the classroom willingly. Little parental pressure exists, for the average age of the community college student is twenty-eight. The most significant pressure in her life is the ability to become economically independent. Lazere wonders if denying these students "access to [academic] language" denies them the possibility of "gaining valuable weapons for cracking upper-class codes so as to more effectively compact the class structure"(10).

Access to academic language through the writing handbook and other instructional tools allows the student to understand the language of the academy and marketplace. Philosophical principles about hegemony and homogeneity fill academic journals and texts, rarely taking into account the realities of the community college classroom. The discussions include such issues as race, gender, age, or ethnicity, and the crucial question of privileged discourse. However, my community college students are searching for a way to enter the discourse. To include them in this world of privileged language is ethical and essential. To deny them this opportunity is arrogant and dishonest.

Lazere recognizes the irony evident in some critics debates:

> Many of them teach at the same 'elite' universities they denounce as bastions of the ruling class...Thus academic radicals almost inevitably...appear to be denigrating the value of their own cultural codes (including scrupulous adherence to standard English)...codes which they can afford to take for granted – in the eyes of students or of teachers in less prestigious schools, for whom these codes are far less accessible. For such students and teachers, radical teachers' belittling of academic English is bound again not only to appear as patronizing but, in effect, as a denial of access to the radical possibilities in academic culture.(16)

Carolyn Ericksen Hill acknowledges the push-pull arguments about grammar in the classroom in her text *Writing from the Margins: Power and Pedagogy for Teachers of Composition*. Those who defend teaching grammar often adhere to rigid skill development and dismiss "experimental research"; they worship grammar study(226). This attitude shuts down any attempt at open, clear discussion about the issue. Hill recognizes that many of her own students – like many community college students – "cannot at least find the subjects and verbs in their sentences (especially when so many of those sentences cry out for a reader-writer dialogue needing a common vocabulary)"(230). Often their lack of knowledge in the areas of grammar and punctuation interferes with a student's message. Therefore, Hill provides her audience with a reasonable suggestion:

> Giving grammar a voice now and then in our classes as an interactive force rather than an authoritative one lets it be understood always to be dwelling *anyway* as a silent partner in everything we say or write.(230)

My own students know through their own private language usage that each code of communication has its own structure and "rules" when making meaning. They observe the "silent partner" in academic English. They deserve to know the accepted structure and rules of standard English so that they, too, may communicate and make meaning in various public forms of language. To experience "the dissonances, the fears, the frustrations" of not knowing the accepted codes marginalizes students who have not learned the codes which govern the academy and marketplace(Hill 237). If they lack authority in English, they know it.

One of Elizabeth Rankin's teaching assistants also recognizes the "thorny political issues" surrounding teaching English(105). Meredith argues against teaching English, not because it should be under the domain of high school teachers, but because it encompasses the significant issue of "who has the power to decide what we in English teach"(105). The teaching assistant wonders in her own journal if composition classes are the service industry to the rest of the academy, and if composition instructors "owe" other professors students well versed in standard English(105). Her view of her work as a teacher appears narrow; composition instructors serve their students first, the academy may not even be a close second. When teachers view their work only as a part of the academy, they deny the social and cultural influences in their students' lives. Perhaps this may be a situation particular to the university, but in the community

college, instructors see beyond the academy. They see confident and involved citizens.

Believing that academic language is the only key to success is a tenet that Lillian Bridwell-Bowles dismisses. Understanding academic language can contribute to "linguistic and rhetorical flexibility [and] may help students to write better conventional prose"(Experimental Writing 46). Bridwell-Bowles applauds students who "establish a dialectical relation with much previous knowledge...[and]take a position apart from the established academy"(47). She also acknowledges the fear that many students – and scholars – experience when attempting to depart from the accepted norm. Yet in the community college composition classroom where the rules are often taught, they are also questioned, manipulated, and reformatted to adapt to the social and cultural changes many poststructuralists promote.

Education, in any subject area, allows students to understand the potential of their lives. As indicated in my journals, community college students are aware of the constraints society imposes upon them. They have lived the cultural restrictions of American society. They seek the tools necessary to help them comprehend the nuances of the academy and of the marketplace. They require the tools to dismantle the constraints and restrictions they experience.

Teaching Standard English With a Writing Handbook at NOVA

In the fall, 1994, I had the privilege to teach a demonstrative, enthusiastic group of students who enjoyed participating in workshops and group discussions. They were mature young adults who represented countries from around the globe: Brazil, German, India, Iran, Italy, Pakistan, Somalia, and Nicaragua. Approximately four students were native-born Americans; one from Puerto Rico and three African-Americans from the Washington D.C. area. The majority of students were female adults in their early to mid-twenties. Two women were mothers with children. The young men in the class were either recent high school graduates or military personnel earning college credits through their military benefits. Most of the students had jobs in business offices, retail establishments, and restaurants. We celebrated the classes cultural diversity through individual journal writings, collaborative presentations, and formal academic assignments.

At the outset of the semester we investigated specific rules of grammar and mechanics; in addition, we reviewed the writing process and each student's individual writing experiences. Throughout the semester we used *The Bedford Handbook* as our guide to the writing process. We flagged areas that the class as a whole decided were important to the writing process. Moreover, I suggested that the students follow a course of action recommended by Mina P. Shaughnessy in *Errors and Expectations*. Each student analyzed their own editing problems in

their writing and discussed them on a "goals sheet" which I provided. The sheet contained questions relating to reworking the framework of an essay, resolving any problems with basic "meaning," and reaching particular editing goals in grammar and mechanics. Along with these discussions, I asked them to comment on the *Bedford* text.

The students filled out the goals sheets over the course of the semester, and some of their answers are listed below. After each student's answer, I provided a brief discussion about improvement in the student's writing performance; often the improvement was substantial, rarely was a goal ignored. This effort allowed "the student to count his victories as he goes and thereby [grew] in confidence"(Shaughnessy 127). The goals sheets helped each student determine "where he is and what he knows and allows him to imagine something else...evidence of a change ...'development'"(Bartholomae 146). These students' efforts punctuate the need for teaching standard English in the community college classroom, and underscore the value of the writing handbook as a guide in the learning process.

Naturally, the students' opinions can be questioned, considering the circumstances under which they were asked to perform. They knew that their answers were going to be reviewed by their instructor, and they knew that their answers were going to be included in this doctoral project. However, they do

provide insight into some of the issues in this work into the world of the community college composition classroom.

The question states: "Has the textbook helped you achieve revision work within your writings?" "How?" (Answers are not edited.)

P.G: -- *learning important grammatical rules, use of verb tense, mood, voice, making me on the look-out and aware of common mistakes; if I have questions about rules I can look after in the book and normally find an answer. I like the Bedford !* (P.G. was a conscientious student who asked me to edit her journal writings, as well as her more formal writings. In addition, we often met after class to review her work. She had a strong desire to move on toward a B.A. degree, and transferred to George Mason University. Rarely, did her work have problems with meaning or content. Her latest academic effort demonstrated a clearer knowledge about the idioms within the English language and the connotations of the words she selected.)

S.J.: *Yes, but I have not really given the examples full use yet. It's hard to change the way you go about writing.* (S.J.'s improvement centered on several levels: content, voice and revision. We agreed that he needs to work on editing out sentence fragments, and proofreading. Often, he considered this a long and arduous task, but he did make the effort.)

T.D.: *Yes.* (T.D. remained an aloof student throughout the semester. His papers demonstrated some good skills in content and meaning; however, his effort was minimal. This frustrated me, and I wondered how to best approach a student with this type of attitude. He failed to address a very important element in a paper assignment the class worked on for two weeks. I found his aloofness a serious challenge to my teaching abilities.)

R.A.: *Yes, the textbook has helped me a great deal by noting some specific areas of difficulty for many writers. Some of which I have notice to be some of my own areas of difficulty. When I revise my work I use the book as a reference to assist me with any points of difficulty.* (R.A. was another conscientious young woman who rarely missed a class session, and constantly asked thoughtful, penetrating questions about the writing process. She took workshops seriously, offering constructive advice to her classmates. Most

importantly, her voice came through strongly in her own writings. She used the textbook as a guide to editing her papers, most of which were free of technical errors.)

G.K.: *The textbook is my "crutch" in organizing my final essays.* (G.K. wrote creative, thoughtful assignments in both academic writings and journal entries. Sharing her essays for workshops was difficult for her; she felt "defensive at a challenge/critique of [her] finished thoughts." Don't we all.)

M.L.: *The textbook has helped in revising, in what to look for & what may need to be revised.* (Watching M.L. develop as a writer was a writing instructor's dream. Her first essays were tentative, and she often offered generalizations to topic questions. Mid-semester she "punched through" and discovered her writing talents. On one particularly sensitive work, she asked me to be her workshop partner. It was about her view, as opposed to her family's view, of religion, and I felt privileged that she shared this work with me.)

C.L.: *Yes! It has everything in it!* (C.L. struggled through the first few writing assignments, formal and informal. However, on one assignment the students were to choose a friend or family member as their audience. C.L. did, and suddenly her voice as a writer developed. Her confidence grew in class discussions, workshops and her subsequent writings. She found reworking her essays helped because she had "gotten another perspective and opinions from someone else. Criticism always has helped [her] writing.")

M.E.: (when answering a related question about the text) *I used a book in high school but I don't remember much about it. This book has been very helpful. One of the things that scared me about writing was the grammar. I never really understood sentence structure beyond the basics. This book goes into great detail and is easy to read.* (M.E. was a veteran who worked as a waiter, as well as attended NOVA. During the first week of school he asked me to review a paper for a history class because it had been years since he had to write an essay. His work reflected a basic knowledge of the traditional five-paragraph essay format. His writing constantly improved throughout the semester. Concentrating on content rather than formalities, he succeeded in communicating well with his audience. He believed that writing was "something that has always plagued [him]." He overcame his initial fears well.)

S.A. *Yes, the textbook has helped alot. Whenever my instructor tells me to improve on certain things I go back and see the right way from the book and use it-For ex. I had problem in using fewer transition words. Therefore I referred to the book and tried to use them to shorten my sentences.* (S.A. wrote an intelligent, creative piece about the racial divisions in her native country. She wrote it as an editorial for *The Times of India*, and addressed issues of class struggle and the need for integration. She succeeded in writing such a strong piece because she felt it reflected her intense feelings about the issue. Using her handbook as a guide for technical help, she was able to focus on her ideas rather than mechanics when she wrote this piece.)

S.M.: *Yes, the textbook is a good guide to go back and check for the unit right verb-tens agreement or mechanics problem.* (S.M. passed the structured grammar examination in ESL, therefore gaining entrance into freshman composition. However, she demonstrated serious difficulty in articulating her thoughts on paper. Her sentences remained stilted, and they failed to communicate the meaning she had intended. She constantly worked hard on her writing assignments, but she continued to need to become more comfortable with the English language as a whole before focusing on academic writing. I fear that frustration with the language caused her to give up. I discussed the struggle of ESL students with educators in that field, and we agreed that a large gulf remains between their views of who should enter freshman composition and the requirements of the course.)

P.V.: *Yes, specially the "editing for grammar" & "editing for punctuation" sections.* (in response to a related question) *I like the Bedford because it explains grammar, punctuation & writing in simple explanations. It is easy to read and follow directions. I used it last semester as well. It is different from most grammar books because it breaks the sections of grammar & punctuation in smaller segments and gives good examples to clarify & teach.* (When reviewing students' writing assignments, I often looked for P.V.'s first. Her writings offered thoughtful, mature responses to topic questions. Her voice was evident in each work. One work reflected a serious disagreement she had with her husband. While still demonstrating her emotional investment in the piece, she offered her argument in a logical, reasonable manner.)

As a result of these responses, and of the research I did that semester, I changed the reader for the following semesters. The new reader, Jack Selzer's *Conversations: Readings for Writing* contained sections which included the issues of standard English, of public language vs. private language, and of legislation requiring a national language. I wanted my students to question these topics because they directly affect their own writing efforts and their own positions within the academy.

Private and Public Language

The prominent issues of public vs. private languages affect my community college composition classroom in a significant way. The two-year college student – like many of the students Mina Shaughnessy and other critics discuss – recognizes the difference between their home language and their public language. Across the country, teachers in two-year schools have observed that since World War II their students bring to the classroom a larger variety of English dialects along with various home languages. Theorists in composition and English journals frequently argue about the differences between these public and private languages. My students feel comfortable speaking to each other in their private languages. Sometimes, fellow students are left out of the conversations; often, I am.

Integration and open admissions have allowed the increasing numbers of nontraditional students to enter higher education. As a result, composition theorists, along with theorists from other disciplines, began to study language differences. They have explored the variety of private languages, the relationship between students and standard English, and the uses of both in students' writings. Critics declared an appreciation and respect for private languages. They encouraged students to listen to each other and to appreciate the diversity within their classroom community. They developed a variety of writing assignments and techniques which explored students' languages.

A world view offers an opportunity for interconnection within the classroom. In my classroom, diverse voices gather together for three hours a week, and this provides me the opportunity to demonstrate the elements of language which bind the students together rather than separate them from each other.

Janice M. Albert, a community college educator in California, expresses some of the frustrations which confront a two-year college teacher. She writes about a reunion with former college friends who have gone on to professorships at four-year institutions and/or have become critics within the academy. She believes that "what we [the community college teacher] do is generally misunderstood by the academy"(12). These former colleagues are not familiar with the non-traditional student who "fell off the high school assembly line to marry, to

earn money, and to find a new vision of themselves"(13). Community college teachers encounter "students" who do not resemble the traditional college or university student. The "goal in the classroom is to give higher education a human face"(14). This "face" reflects the multiplicity of this country's current population. The students who have attended my classes over the past few years represent a variety of traditions and cultures: Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Native American, and various Western cultures.

Even Mary L. Needham's classroom in Memphis resembles this "face." She states that this "population of learners...run the gamut from the most pink-cheeked, inexperienced youngster to the most worldly senior citizens"(16). She reminds the reader that students today confront many pressures not felt in the past: managing a job, a home, a family, financial struggles from job loss or blended families, and loss of self-esteem because of past academic failures. She reflects that innovative methods can help the community college "to challenge their four-year counterparts for the respect of America's economic and academic communities"(16).

Although this may be true, both Needham and Albert fail to address the need for constant educational renewal for the community college teacher. Motivation and fulfillment are excellent virtues for those who prefer to enter higher education as an instructor, rather than a researcher. The respect for

diversity inherent in recent composition theory offers the community college educator avenues to create empowering theory which invites consideration of and respect for the community college classroom and its students. Needham does admire an educator who "emphasizes the need to keep up with changing times, to scuttle stolid and predictable lectures in favor of new methods"(22). Community college educators are able to update their own knowledge of new methods and theories by participating in the creation of scholarship which can be shared by their peers.

The Relationship Between Language and Composition

According to Myron C. Tuman, the difference between speaking situations and writing situations often demands two separate languages, one for speaking and one for writing. For most students speech is easy and spontaneous. But writing is "structurally and functionally different from speech" and eliminates any sense of spontaneity(14). Teachers need to tread carefully when challenging students to write as naturally as they speak. In the diverse classroom, many students do not have the confidence nor the skill to speak or to write for a public audience.

Yet, do we need to separate verbal messages from written ones? Or, do we need to integrate the comfort of a private language with a public one? In

order to transform a "traditional, 'closed' world to a modern, 'open' one...can be explained in large measure as a shift in how people communicate"(Tuman 70). A formalized separation does not serve the student nor the teacher in composition studies. As Tuman phrases it, "what is essential...is the progressive deepening of both assimilation and accommodation"(80).

When revising my syllabus, I wanted to integrate the challenges of writing reports with the challenges of presenting them to the class. Therefore, I required group presentations with the mid-semester collaborative inquiry project. I felt that the students would benefit from first communicating their ideas within smaller groups, and then they could feel more comfortable making presentations to the whole class. In addition, the collaborative process helped their writing skills. Constant peer reviews and group research provided the students with sympathetic feedback from the other members of their group.

In "The Interaction of Public and Private Literacies," Richard Courage speaks to the privileging of academic language over social expression. He believes that "the question of academic discourse is often reduced to a dichotomous choice – a matter of declaring allegiance either to the student's own language or to academic literacy"(484). Courage admits that some "champions of academic literacy" believe that the full academic discourse has been denied to the non-traditional student and these students need to be assimilated into the

system(485). He wonders, however, if there is a need for demarcation, separation of public and private languages. After reviewing two students' efforts in composition, Courage states that non-traditional students benefit from seeing "their existing literacy practices as 'cultural resources'"(494). These students are discovering themselves as "literate people" who own "rich material for critical examination of the ways different literacy practices mark social boundaries and maintain hierarchies"(494). Whenever I read my students' response papers to the Rodriguez and Villanueva essays, I draw knowledge and strength from their work. This assignment reveals rich information about private language and culture from my students, and I celebrate this information every time we work on these essays.

Kenneth Bruffee allows for assimilation and accommodation when he speaks about the community of writers. He respects public and private languages, admits to ownership of a particular vernacular language, and writes about his membership in the university instruction community ("Social Construction" 777). He states that language needs to be placed "at the center of our understanding of knowledge and of the authority of knowledge"(778). Throughout his works Bruffee places his students' work in high regard.

In "Social Construction, Language and the Authority of Knowledge: A Bibliographical Essay," Bruffee quotes from Thomas Kuhn and Richard Rorty. He describes Kuhn's work as challenging, especially "its social constructionist

epistemological assumptions. A social constructionist position in any discipline assumes that entities we normally call reality, knowledge, thought, facts, texts, selves...are constructs generated by communities of like-minded peers"(774). Richard Rorty, according to Bruffee, "says that all knowledge is a social construct"(774). And Rorty places "the assumptions of the traditional cognitive theory of knowledge in serious question"(774). Since the study of language constantly challenges old paradigms, this has the "potential to lead English teachers to seriously rethink many of our disciplinary and professional interests, values, goals, and practices"("Social Construction" 775). Knowledge is communicated through the language system, and, for Bruffee, "this places reading and writing...at the center of the liberal arts curriculum and the whole educational process"("Social Construction" 778). He encourages the elimination of "universals and absolutes," and believes that education today must prepare us for the "enormous multiplicity" of today's society("Social Construction" 779).

The students in my journals belong to a multiplicity of language communities, and these men and women depend on educators who acknowledge and respect these constructs. Once again, Bruffee's work influenced my own in the classroom. The collaborative inquiry project, which I mentioned earlier, allowed my students to assimilate and accommodate each other's language communities.

Villanueva labels the dichotomy between language communities "biculturalism," which does *not* signify "an equal ease with two cultures"(39). He distinguishes this as an unattainable "ideal"(39). Rather than idealize a melting of cultures into one voice with one language, Villanueva recognizes the tensions inherent in biculturalism "which are caused by being unable to deny the old or the new"(39). This postmodern critic has dealt with the tensions of biculturalism throughout his life time and resents it. He does not want to erase the core of his existence, his race. Neither do many community college students. They do not deny "other-cultural affiliation," but they do want to become part of the collective(Villanueva 39). They are not products of a society which overtly hinders personal cultural growth as Villanueva – and his counterpart Richard Rodriguez – are. They feel they can embrace American culture while participating in their native culture. Perhaps this too is an "ideal," yet these attempts cannot be ignored, nor patronized. They gain the knowledge necessary to reflect upon the demands of the dominant culture and teach the members of the dominant culture aspects of their native cultures. Villanueva's struggle often seems arcane to these students; they have unknowingly benefited from his discoveries and writings.

Villanueva's discussions about biculturalism embrace the issues of language. Community college instructors face the challenge of incorporating various voices into a language and corresponding writings which are "adequate enough to

make ...dreams,...visions,...stories,...thinking, and...actions not just revolutionary but transformative"(Bridwell-Bowles, "Freedom, Form" 46). The students of two-year colleges know the meaning of transformation; they live it. They are participants in higher education on one level and marginalized in society on other levels. For them, language represents the potential to transform themselves into student-writers, to comprehend other language communities which they encounter on their campuses, and to decode the nuances of language in the academic and business worlds.

Multiple language communities exist in the community college classroom. Students who speak Vietnamese may exclude those who speak Spanish. Standard English may be their common language in the classroom, but it is not their common language in the cafeteria. This may appear chaotic to an outside observer, but it is considered the norm on many community college campuses. The challenge in the classroom is to demonstrate the relationship among the languages represented, thus illustrating to students the similarities, not the differences, in their forms of communication. Community college composition instructors need to separate themselves from the traditional methods of hegemony and display respect for the various languages evident in their classrooms. Discussing the issues and creating related assignments and research acknowledges public and

private language. This effort places the student at the center of compositional studies, not the arbitrary rules of academic language.

Leslie Kreiner and Alan Merickel, two composition instructors at Tallahassee Community College, provide an outstanding solution to the dilemma of public and private languages. While demonstrating a sincere respect for the private language of their diverse student body, these two educators propose a method of teaching standard English as public discourse: the bilingual method. Kreiner and Merickel do not want to "break" their student's "fire and spirit," but rather "accommodate...[the] Englishes and the private languages of their students"(284). "At risk is the issue of self-esteem," Kreiner and Merickel continue,"Students need to feel that the language they grew up with, the slang they speak with their friends at home is legitimate"(285). The academic and business community constantly remind them that "standard English is superior, or, more importantly, they learn that their language conventions are inferior, reinforcing the realities of discrimination and exacerbating problems of alienation and self-esteem"(Kreiner Merickel 285). This freezes out creativity and imagination, eliminating the "very distinction that makes them individuals – their cultural backgrounds"(285). Their languages and their cultures deserve celebration, not contradiction.

Adopting a bilingual approach and incorporating various writing assignments through which students can communicate in their private languages as well

as their public language privileges all of the languages represented in the classroom. These two community college theorists created informal writing activities, reading enhancement activities, formal reader-response papers, and creative writing activities. The combination of these assignments allowed the students to gain confidence when doing academic work without belittling their own cultural backgrounds.

Exploring Language in My Classroom

After first witnessing the difficulty my NOVA students encountered with academic English, I investigated these various critics and authorities on the issues of public and private language. Their scholarship motivated me to change the direction of my composition course and to encourage my colleagues in the English department to change their assigned reader textbook.

The world majority students as well as native born American students who took my composition course constantly struggled with the formality of standard English. They found the syntax stilted and uncomfortable. We compared the language to the formal evening attire a guest may wear to a state dinner at the White House. We agreed that we wanted to accept the invitation, wear the appropriate clothes, and speak the appropriate language that the event demands. However, the clothes may be scratchy, the shoes too tight, and the table talk may

bore us. Yet, this comparison prompted us to discuss how we become aware of how we choose the diction appropriate for situations in our public and private lives and writings.

I altered the course several ways. First, I included more informal writing assignments by assigning a journal at the beginning of the semester. The questions for the journal entries focused on public and private language and the students' individual writing experiences. Students' entries were not graded nor corrected. Each student was graded on the number of entries completed. Because these assignments came early in the semester, the class was reacquainted with the writing experience without the consequence of a grade. This proved to be a much more relaxed method to enter a composition course for my students. As I learned about my students through the answers to their journal questions, I adjusted the syllabus.

Second, I changed the focus of our reading assignments. I selected essays from Jack Selzer's text, *Conversations*, which specifically discuss the issues of public and private languages, of standard English vs. non-standard English, of instituting a national language in the United States, and of inclusion and exclusion. In addition, we explored the writing techniques found in explanatory and persuasive discourse. Finally, I redefined the nature of several of the graded

writing assignments for the semester. Each assignment reflected one of the language issues we covered in our reading assignments.

As an experienced adjunct faculty member at NOVA, I am increasingly aware of the growing diversity within the student population. Students who attended local high schools are merged into classes with students who attended secondary schools from around the world. In addition, a growing number of non-traditional students are signing up for English 111 – homemakers, people re-entering the workplace, retired military personnel, current military personnel, and government workers.

When the classroom includes this variety of students, the traditional methods of teaching seem obsolete. The challenge is to encourage each student to develop independently while creating a community of writers within the classroom. The following is a list of reading and informal writing assignments which center on the topic of language. More formal papers also center on the topic of language diversity. I am sure these suggestions can be adjusted for the university as well as the high school classroom.

The Journal:

Each semester my students are required to keep a journal, and the topics for discussion are a series of questions about language. Students are reminded that their responses may be read by their classmates; this avoids the painfully

personal responses often found in students' work. The following questions are from *Language and Reflection* by Anne Ruggles Gere, et al. At the conclusion of this chapter, I share many of the responses I received from my students.

On Language:

> What is your definition of language?
> Can you remember anything about the process by which you learned to use language?
> What have you learned about language in school? outside of school?
> Have you ever caught yourself using language dishonestly?
> In what circumstances does language give you pleasure?
> In what circumstances does language give you pain?
> What are the most important differences between your uses of spoken and written language?
> Are you satisfied with the way you use language? Why or why not?(Gere, et al. 69)

Questions on Writing:

> Can you remember the first thing you ever wrote?
> What kinds of writing have you done for yourself (rather than for a school assignment)? Was the writing experience different? How?
> What is the most satisfying school assignment you can remember?
> Have teachers, their writing assignments, and their feedback helped or hindered you in learning to write? In what ways?
> Has feedback from friends, peers, or family members helped you learn to write?
> Under what conditions do you write best? Most happily? With the most frustration? With the most satisfying results?
> Do you ever draw or doodle as part of the writing process?
> What relationship do you see between the reading you do and the writing you do?(Gere, et al. 62)

Our Readings:

"Everyday Use" by Alice Walker – We explore the new persona often associated with entrance into the academic community. This new persona may conflict with the private lives and relationships we encounter outside of the community college campus. We discuss the rhetorical tools demanded by the academy and the business world, and if these tools are valid. Finally, we discuss the value of higher education and who determines this value.

"Pedagogy and Political Commitment: A Comment" by bell hooks – My students feel most comfortable with this particular essay. We spend much time on hooks' opening statement: "Education is a political issue for exploited and oppressed people." Students know that education is not a neutral tool; it can liberate or suffocate an individual, and sometimes it does both.

"Claiming an Education" by Adrienne Rich – I ask the students to replace the references to a woman's position in higher education with a community college student's position in higher education. This is not done to exclude women from the debate, but to invite community college students into a debate in which they are often marginalized. This essay promotes an active rather than passive claim to higher education, thus giving the audience a sense of urgency.

"From Outside, In" by Barbara Mellix, "What's Wrong with Black English" by Rachel L. Jones, and "White English in Blackface, or Who Do I Be?" by

Geneva Smitherman – With these three essays we discuss the issues of language and culture, language and context, and language and power. "Who owns English?" "What is *proper* English?" and "What are the codes and nuances of our own private languages?" These topics demand much more time than we can allocate, but the students take these topics and begin to apply them to much of the work we do for the remainder of the semester.

"Aria: A Memoir of a Bilingual Childhood" by Richard Rodriguez and "Whose Voice Is It Anyway? Rodriguez' Speech in Retrospect" by Victor Villanueva, Jr. – These two essays are the basis for the first formal writing assignment of the semester. Students are to choose passages from either essay and agree or disagree with the author. I urge them to use personal experiences to illuminate their opinions about Rodriguez' or Villanueva' works. Consistently, my students have rejected Rodriguez' notion of diminishing the private self for the public self. They are appalled by the nuns who advocate using English rather than Spanish in the Rodriguez home. As a result we speculate about authority, and how that authority enters our private lives. Over the past two years, not one of my students believed that it was worth losing family intimacy to become accepted into public discourse. These students included people from around the world as well as the inner city or the mountains of West Virginia. These students enjoy discovering their own voices and the language associated with their cultural and personal

identities. "But," I ask them, "can effective communication exist if many different voices speak?" This question serves as a topic for a second paper.

"Letter to Lord Irwin" by Mahatma Gandhi and "Letter from Birmingham Jail" by Martin Luther King, Jr. – With these two essays students scrutinize how the dominant language can be used against those who "own" it. Gandhi employs his oppressors' language to rebuke their implementation of the salt tax laws. Students marvel at how Gandhi can relay his message on this issue while disclosing his views about violence vs. civil disobedience within his native country of India. We wonder if the British audience to this work comprehend Gandhi's rhetorical strategy. M.L. King's essay follows the theme of civil disobedience vs. violent actions, yet he also reflects upon violence in language. Initially, we reflect upon King's use of standard English. By this point in the semester, we have investigated the application of standard English to the academic and the commercial worlds. This essay attests to a writer's ability to question, to challenge, and to probe an oppressor's behavior through the knowledge and application of his language.

Some Students' Voices on Language

[These excerpts have not been altered nor corrected.]

(1) *On too many occasions language has caused me a great deal of pain usually it was a result of talking to 'the best doctors in the world.' 'You're daughter has a brain a brain tumor."*

(2) *Language can be painful in many different ways, especially during family problems. My family has many problems and arguing is the main source of language.*

(3) *In daily routines language can give me pain. Imagine yourself trying to get in a understanding with someone and you never make the point clear with a person. It happen all the time.*

(4) *There are several different circumstances in which language gives me pain. One example is the English language. Since it is not my native language I still have trouble understanding it every now and then...*

(5) *Most of the time for me language never gives me pain. Last night was a different story. I love to talk that is my pride in joy. Last night I had to tell my father that my aunt's mother died last night around 10:30pm...she was sort of a member of the family. I had to break the news to my father that gave me great pain in my heart.*

(6) *Language gives me pain every time I say or write something wrong or inappropriate. When I am using some kind of informal language, for example with my friends, it doesn't bother me that much...It's another story when I'm using formal language. If I am writing a paper or getting into a conversation, the people reading my paper or listening to me will notice if I make any mistakes.*

(7) *One circumstance in which language give me pain is when I write an academic paper...I also have a problem with writing my thoughts down...Language gives me pain when I have to talk in front of people I am the quiet shy type, so most of the time I don't say anything at all.*

(8) *Language does not often give me pain regardless its origin. However, I feel some short pains in some circumstances such as the very first day of using a new language in a situation where I have to have my needs satisfied [The student then explains an unfortunate encounter at JFK Airport in New York after arriving from Africa.]*

(9) *Language give me pain when someone uses it for insulting, and whenever it used to express someone's death.*

(10) *When I study and learn a foreign language, language gives me pain. [A student recently immigrated from Vietnam].*

(11) *The actions that cause circumstances of pain are tormenting, sarcasism, torture, misery, denial, rejection, betrayal, divorce, separation, death, farewell, sickness, war...*

(12) *Language seems to be a major cause of pain in my life right now. At this point, language is my worst enemy. What tops it off, I know that I cannot defeat language...Here is a current example of how language causes me pain [Actually, the pain was also caused by the lack of language.].*

Theories and principles promoted by various composition critics are obscure to my English 111 students. They have little knowledge of the tenets of postmodernism, deconstruction, or Marxism, and they see no relationship between formalized theory and their lives. However, these students often discuss the fragmentation they feel, the connection they desire, and the frustration they experience within their journals. Perhaps if community college instructors participate more often in theoretical discussions, they can search for more diverse methods to include their students' disparate voices into a more integrated composition experience.

Chaos in the Composition Classroom:
Why Do Some Classes Fail to Function

Sometimes a semester just does not work; the final journal in this project is an example. As hard as I tried to investigate innovative methods and theories about how to instruct a difficult class, I did not find an answer to my problems. Some entries display my frustration about an unsuccessful class activity. Often students sat quietly while I tried desperately to pull them into discussions about private and public language. Similar activities and discussion techniques had worked in the past. The demographics of this class was somewhat different – a younger group. However, I did not think this would substantially affect the nature of my teaching.

As a result, I explored a newly formulated theory which connects the scientific principles of chaos with current educational dilemmas. Through chaos theory, I began to view the failures and successes of that semester in a different light. I learned to accept that positive results are not often immediate; they are better understood from a distance.

The elements of chaos theory-based education are the learner, learning, instruction, location, and commitment. However, the principal element in chaos theory-based education is the learner. All other elements of the paradigm are

placed in service to the learner, which is certainly a change in the American educational system. This change in the learning process is critical to education in an ever evolving global economy. Because "the world is shrinking" and most corporations and industries have offices in all parts of the world, the "American" student in an "American educational institution" must develop competencies and skills which can be translated into *world-wide* competencies and skills.

Chaos theory connects with the educational environment when educators and administrators engage in a vision which dismisses either/or thinking, accepts flexibility, acknowledges constant activity, viewpoints, and interpretations(Wheatley 64). What educators may find difficult is the absence of an hierarchy, an ideal inherent in chaos theory because the entire process upholds the belief of interdependence – a dependence on each other to share the complexities of life. This interdependence requires action; often the enactment may even precede planning, thus allowing the classroom environment to create itself. For the educator and the administrator the process of chaos theory may be viewed as self-transcending, self-renewing, and self-organizing.

As business and educational institutions collaborate, they determine the necessary competencies for future workers. These competencies include the following: the ability to work with resources, the ability to work with others, the ability to acquire and use information, the ability to understand complex

interrelationships, and the ability to work in a variety of technologies. To satisfy these requirements three areas of education are necessary: the basic skills of reading, writing, and performing arithmetic and mathematical operations. Students need the skills of listening and speaking concisely, of thinking critically and creatively, and of accepting a commitment to lifelong learning. Personal qualities that educational institutions and businesses can help foster are responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, integrity, and honesty.

Expansion and acceptance of these new requirements are the challenge. To better serve my students, I need to bridge the skills necessary for an education in the field of English with the skills necessary for employment in a global economy. However, the most essential skill that I can encourage them to develop is the skill of global citizenship. While I am performing all of the above duties, I still feel that I have one requirement to which I must be faithful, and that is my commitment to serving the diverse needs of my students. Studying theories of multiculturalism and learning about diversity in the classroom remain constant in my personal educational process.

Chaos Theory: A Layman's View

Classical physics is deeply rooted in ancient paradigms from philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, and from mathematicians such as Pythagoras.

Civilization depended upon such thoughts for centuries; the educated populace believed in the "essence or ideal." They followed Plato's theories of dualism and Aristotle's remarks on "common sense." Pythagoras offered his followers the notion that physical reality consisted of geometric figures, mathematics realities and forms. Math became the language of communicating with universal truths because theorists could prove ideas with equations. Copernicus received confidence in his studies from the "truth" of mathematics. Kepler took his knowledge of math and employed it to discuss religious truths such as the Trinity triangle. Galileo, although considered a classicist now, was quite the revolutionary of his time; his work threatened the whole fabric of spiritual and temporal life.

Newton, who studied all of the above scientists, concentrated on mathematical physics and calculus for his work. His theories concerning inertia, straight lines, force, and gravity still permeate some school science textbooks. Most of these classicists believed that the mind had no connection to the physical and the world is divided into two spheres: ideas vs. physical.

Now, new theories are present in the scientific world, and they promise to offer a revolution of thought which shake the very foundations of classical physics. These theories prove that classical science is oppressive, a dead machine. The one-to-one correspondence of systems like mathematics appears obsolete. Einstein's work seems outdated. Terms such as "dualism" acquire new

definitions – the functions of quantum, i.e. wave aspect and particle aspect. Scientific results are not predictable and concrete. Bohr's work has been proven correct: The universe is a creative, integrated, alive organism.

Old romantic notions of unity, wholeness and order do play a significant role in the new theories of physics; however, their roles are different. Classic physics sees the world as a machine; current physics sees the world as a web of relationships. Classical physics believes in closed systems; current physics believes in interdependence. No hierarchy exists in new physics; interconnection is its byword.

From the advent of Einstein's theory of relativity and from the discovery of the quantum world, present day theorists have created a new order of thinking, "chaos theory." Although the roots of chaos theory are formed from Einstein's and Bohr's work in the early 1900's, its current configuration can be applied to many non-scientific areas of study. Presently, some critics are viewing the relationship between chaos theory and public administration, business management, and education; in addition, it is now entering the field of modern literature. Many contemporary novelists, poets, and essayists employ the ideas of interconnection and interdependency while writing their own works about man's relationship to society, nature, and religion. Annie Dillard's *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* is an excellent example of this application.

Several authors have attempted to explain chaos theory to the nonscientific community; some who do this well are A.B. Çambel, James Gleick, Margaret J. Wheatley, and Barbara Mossberg. Each approaches chaos theory from different vantage points. Yet, each theorist also agrees with the belief that chaos is a part of modern life; it is embedded in society and nature. It cannot be ignored. Çambel argues that life is complex, "in nature as well as in artifice. It occurs in large and in small systems. It can be tangible or intangible"(xi). Complexity is a constant presence in modern life.

Traditionally, Çambel reminds us, chaos theory is practiced in the scientific world of quantum mechanics, quantum physics, and mathematics. However, he applauds new hypotheses which apply this practice to other areas of study. "By definition, anything that is applied and interdisciplinary loses its purity and becomes contaminated. This should not be deplored, because complexity itself is not pure; it is replete with paradoxes"(Çambel xii). Çambel reminds us that society will greatly benefit from interdisciplinary studies, especially when we dispel classical, rigid dogmas which restrict our thinking.

Chaos theory acknowledges the world's diversity "in composition, form, and function"(Çambel 1). It promotes the tenet which speculates that seemingly unrelated artifacts when taken together display continuity and patterns that suggest different things rather when studied separately. Random events or patterns lead to

momentous kinds of events. It is a confirmation that even accidental contact enriches a global experience. Chaos theory is a perception of value, a function of understanding everything in relation to everything else. For example, a view out an airplane window allows the viewer to see the whole, as opposed to its complex parts. Chaos theory celebrates diversity, disorder, change; as opposed to stability, harmony, and order. Hierarchy and power are eliminated by interconnectedness and interdependence. Chaos theory describes man and nature, it does not define it. Chaos and complexity are a creative state in which order and disorder mingle; they are dynamic, continually changing explanations of the world's condition.

Traditionally, thought is divided into organized fragments of knowledge; this runs counter to our experience; we know that diversity is integrated into life. Every new piece of data destabilizes what is already known. Critics of chaos may be uncomfortable with these new leaps in thought. Classical theorists decree that the world is supposed to work in a particular order, yet this is counter to what actually happens. What these theorists believe to be out of control is profoundly orderly; often, the viewer must step away in time and space. The most useful aspect of chaos theory is that it basically gives us knowledge of the world as a real world, provides a mandate not to leave out things, and encourages thinking about connections. The processes of change are simultaneously occurring. From

a distance things look smooth, but turbulence is occurring over time and space. Order and disorder co-exist, interrelating in a very orderly way; fragments appearing as wholes unto themselves are also related to the larger whole. Changes which happen in the system's margins affect the mainstream.

Gleick purports that "where chaos begins, classical science stops"(3). All of nature disputes the Newtonian ideal of an ordered universe. For Gleick, the world has passed through two generations of science since Einstein and Bohr dispelled Newton's classical principles. Over time, nonspecialists have been able to apply these new theoretical beliefs to their own understanding of the world(Gleick 7). While discussing Edward Lorenz's "Butterfly Effect"(simply stated, if a butterfly flaps its wings in China, this event will effect the weather in New York), Gleick remarks carefully that, "in science as in life, it is well known that a chain of events can have a point of crisis that could magnify small changes. But chaos meant that such points were everywhere"(23). Lorenz's system displayed on a map a complexity which was non-repetitive, a scene of disorder where no point ever reoccurs, "yet is also signed a new kind of order"(Gleick 30).

Barbara Mossberg recommends to students of chaos theory: peer out at earth from a spaceship(3). She encourages viewing life on our planet:

> Up close, details distinguish; things appear random, coincidental, perhaps out of place...Away you see how things look altogether, how it all works, interfunctions...Different things co-exist in one coherent structure of meaning.(3)

Mossberg reminds her readers that "we think that chaos is a mistake to be corrected, to be fixed, if we could with sufficient reason, energy, intelligence, wisdom, and luck"(2). Observers of chaos feel a need to "solve it." This is certainly a feeling I experienced in Spring 1996.

Margaret Wheatley also reminds her readers that in chaos theory continuity and unity are evident when the observer willingly grants "primary value to the relationships that exist among seemingly discrete parts"(9). Eliminating the need for one ordered answer allows for "a new kind of freedom"(Wheatley 7). This theorist states that the "new physics cogently explains that there is no objective reality out there waiting to reveal its secrets"(7). Reality is "what we create through our engagement with others and with events"(Wheatley 7). Those searching for the "end result" or structure of a work need to step back, allow some distance, for finally observe the outcome. Moreover, "it is not important that [critics] agree on one expert interpretation or one sure-fire application"(Wheatley 9). Reality reinforces our knowledge that the world is amorphous and fragmented. Therefore, multiple answers give form to what we know as reality; we must separate ourselves from the desire to achieve an orderly, coherent universe.

The New Paradigm for the Community College Composition Classroom

Several years ago after teaching at the smaller Woodbridge campus, I returned to the Alexandria campus of Northern Virginia Community College. My English 111 class – freshman composition – met for the first time, and I was surprised at the diversity within the classroom population. It was a "mini U.N." Each student was from a different background; I was the only white American in the room. Students were from various countries and cultures — even warring nations – Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Puerto Rico, Italy, Germany, Iran, and Iraq. I faced a challenge which I had never faced before – or since. Therefore, I researched some work on the community college population nationally and locally.

In her studies, theorist Helon Howell Raines confronts many educators' stereotypes about the community college. She reminds readers that "as many different kinds and sizes of two-year colleges exist as do different kinds of four-year and research institutions"(152). In addition, mission statements among community colleges differ, as do those of four-year schools. Too often educators – and the public – categorize two-year schools. Many imagine crowded urban institutions or rural schools which specialize in agricultural activities. Moreover, Raines reveals that many believe the myth that "teaching in two-year schools is primarily remedial, vocational, and difficult, if not impossible, to do

successfully"(152). She shatters that myth. The community college is an institution which invites those needing a second chance, and it opens its doors to those who want to increase their educational options. To teach these students is not impossible, and it can be done successfully.

However, as indicated in my journals, a "romantic" view of the student population must be avoided. Students drop out of classes constantly. They fail to notify teachers and administrators of their decisions, causing confusion at final grading time. Often students attend classes sporadically, thinking that they can easily catch-up on missed assignments without the benefit of classroom participation. Outside responsibilities and family crises interfere with their studies. The demands of the workplace force these students to drop one or two courses because of the stress. Many students have limited incomes and cannot purchase required texts. More importantly, many of these student have tried college work before and failed.

All of these elements create an academic atmosphere which is chaotic at best. They demand flexibility, vision, and a willingness to share the complexities of life through an educational openness to interconnection and collaboration.

The standards for the community college classroom have become stale and predictable. Critical theories such as postmodernism and social construction can be successfully assimilated into community college course work. These two

literary theories in particular can be integrated into the established principles of chaos theory – especially an acknowledgement of disorder as reality and the significance of interdependence.

Educators should consider moving away from a logo centric view of language to a more fluid, open view of language. This new system can incorporate the complexity and diversity of languages which would broaden it beyond the static notion of one-to-one correspondence between item and reality. Postmodernism and social construction allow for a web of relationships in language which are interconnected and equal. The hierarchical, reductive nature of language disappears. Overcoming the separateness of languages implies an opportunity for cohesive unity. Rather than classifying languages – and their speakers – into traditional notions of hierarchy, teachers can bring the languages forward into non-traditional notions of interconnection.

Postmodern theorist Lester Faigley connects his literary/philosophical theory to compositional studies. Cultural conditions within the classroom confirm "the fragmentary, the ephemeral, and the contingent" within society(*Fragments* 4). Faigley recognizes that tension exists "between the transient and the eternal, between low culture and high culture, between the vernacular and the elite, while in postmodernism this tension is lost"(*Fragments* 4). He notices that compositional studies "[coincide] with the era of postmodernity, [and] there is seemingly

little in the short history of composition studies that suggests a postmodern view of heterogeneity and difference as liberating forces"(14). Faigley argues that while the modernist views compositional studies as a process towards a finished product, the postmodern views compositional studies as a celebration of the process and performance(14).

Faigley criticizes teachers in college writing courses for following outmoded theories of form, purpose, and product. Writing topics remove the writer and the reader from any "investment in particular issues"(15). Therefore, a postmodern composition studies program attempts to stress the pluralistic, open democratic classroom – not one *language* but many *languages*.

Perhaps chaos theory can inspire educators to eliminate the hierarchy and division inherent in traditional composition theory. Victor Villanueva believes that "it is surely postmodern to assume that other voices, speaking differently, are to be legitimated"(140). For some, the postmodern condition consists largely of fringe marginalized groups – "the young, the elderly, the unemployed, the unemployable, the woman, the person of color"(Villanueva 142). Such people are the students commonly found in the community college classroom. The followers of chaos theory can substitute the positive terms integration, interrelationships, and interdependency for the negative terms fragmentation, hegemony and hierarchy. Diverse voices in an open, democratic classroom challenge

traditional notions, and composition studies in the community college classroom invites this challenge.

Terms familiar to critics studying chaos theory can also be found in the work of social constructionist Kenneth Bruffee who addresses the issues of reevaluating classroom learning, of the connections between classroom learning and work in the "real world," and of the challenges of learning the "new language" of the academy. He explains all of these issues while maintaining a respect for the individual student and his/her intelligence.

As mentioned earlier in this project, Bruffee gives serious thought as to his place as an educator and to his students' place in the academic environment. He is constantly concerned with the student's situatedness, validating the student's heritage and culture. He encourages students to adopt a collaborative learning environment, one that acknowledges connection and relationships. Collaborative learning requires more work on the educator's part. Reading from prepared lecture notes is certainly less challenging than preparing collaborative projects which consider the variables of the class' "degree of heterogeneity, group size, ethnic background, phases of work, and so on"(*Collaborative Learning* 34). The professor must also accept the fact that the collaborative project might fail, then the professor faces the challenge of analyzing the failure and reformatting the entire project. A willingness to step aside, to disperse authority, to acknowledge

failure, and to explore the topic along with the students creates an exciting, often chaotic, academic environment which benefits all members of the knowledge community.

When the classroom includes a diverse population of students, the traditional methods of teaching seem obsolete. The challenge is to encourage each student to develop independently while creating a community of writers within the classroom. The respect for diversity inherent in postmodern theory and the call for integration and assimilation in social construction offer avenues to create an empowering course which invites consideration of and respect for the community college classroom and its students. Chaos theory allows for fragmentation, yet it advises the educator to eliminate the need for immediate results. Disorder, failures, and confusion are part of the more realistic view of community. Instructors need not be frustrated or angry when these events occur within the classroom. Reality is "what we create through our engagement with others and with events"(Wheatley 7). Those searching for the definitive "end result" need to step back, to allow some distance, to finally observe the outcome. Educators should offer themselves and their students the opportunity of new knowledge, a new way of thinking, a "system of survival and success"(Mossberg 2).

The Spring 1996 journal is an excellent example of how the classroom experience can seem fragmented. Often my attempts to pull the class together

met immediate failure. Most of the students were younger men and women who had *not* succeeded in four-year colleges. Others had not earned a "C" in English 111 in a previous effort at NOVA; therefore, they had to repeat the course. This created a stressful classroom environment because both groups of students were skeptical of the academy. In addition to the stressful environment, the administration's decision to continue registration into February exacerbated the situation. New students appeared at each class meeting during the first few weeks of the semester; this prevented the class from coalescing. Each student appeared splintered from the whole classroom community.

My own anxiety over the situation is evident in the journal. Researching chaos theory under the guidance of Drs. Gail Kettlewell and Barbara Mossberg, and continued discussions with Dr. Richard Gossweiler, allowed me to develop a new manner of thinking and of accepting that success cannot be achieved each semester.

Journal #3
Spring 1996

January 16

Last night Ellen called to warn me that only 10 students had registered for my class. Immediately – selfishly? – I wondered if my class was going to be canceled. I asked Ellen this and she said no, once it meets "it's a go." I still needed to check with her in the morning. In addition, she told me that registration will be open until February 2, so to adjust my syllabus accordingly. The school was only two thirds registered compared to past semesters. The Blizzard of '96 has affected the beginning of our spring semester.

I had mixed feelings about these problems; as an adjunct your schedule is at the whim of so many forces – registration, full-time faculty, department heads. Many of these areas I cannot influence, I'm at their mercy. However, the Alexandria campus usually does not have problems with registration. Normally I have about 22/23 students on the first day, then it balloons up to 28; then it deflates down to 20 by the end of the semester. According to some of my community college readings, this type of attendance is normal.

But to start with only 10! Most English/Composition instructors would be thrilled, but as an adjunct it makes me nervous. Will the forces that be take away my one and only course?

I arrived at campus. Ellen was speaking to another adjunct, telling her that because of low registration her early morning class was going to a full-time faculty member. Uh, oh.

I was next in line to speak to Ellen. Was my class gone too? Finally I asked which classroom was my section located in. She responded, "327." I cheerfully said, "Thanks," and skipped off to meet this semester's new group of potential writers.

I entered Room 327 and saw 10 blank faces staring at me. I always wonder what type of first impression I make as I enter a classroom at the beginning of each semester. We went over all the first day administrative work. I asked each student to introduce him/herself. As usual, each student has a unique and interesting story to tell.

I have unofficially observed that spring semesters have less world majority students than fall semesters. I need to check the demographics on this for the Alexandria campus. This first day, I had no African American, Hispanic or other "minority" students. I wonder why I don't see as many.

After introductions, students seemed more open to asking questions about the syllabus, etc. I feel relieved, even content when class ends.

January 18

Six more students enrolled, but two didn't come back from our last meeting. Net 4. Ellen gave me an updated print out and said many more students are registering. My instinct tells me that I will not meet my normal numbers this semester. My husband, John, did hear a NOVA advertisement 2 times in l0 minutes on the radio stations he listens to while driving into work. Community colleges are so heavily dependent on enrollments each semester.

I reviewed this semester's journal questions with the class. As a result of discussions with Dulce and Dr. Terry Zawacki at GMU, I decided to change my set of journal questions. In addition, I followed Terry's advice of telling students that fellow classmates may read each other's journal entries. Terry felt that my original questions begged student to reveal personal, private comments.

I wonder how students will respond this semester. The one advantage was that the other questions convinced me to be more sympathetic towards my students. I know that I have been concerned with the mother/confessor role of composition teachers in the past, but one benefit of the community college is that students can develop a relationship with their instructor/professor. I need to ask

myself, "What type of relationship will I allow? How much do I want to know about my students?

January 23

We have begun in earnest. Right now registration is at 16 students, and I have settled in with the class. (Registration is still open until Feb. 2) We need to begin work and move forward. I don't want the students to be bored or think that we are not going to do serious work this semester.

Last night I had my first class with R. Gossweiler on community college teaching. He's a breath of fresh air. He's not an administrator nor a theorist; he's a teacher and describes himself as such. He's proud to be a community college teacher, and this declaration makes me proud also. He said he will offer concrete, practical advice based on years of experience. I look forward to his suggestions and comments. So much I have covered at GMU – especially in English – does not recognize the unique teaching techniques for the community college classroom. I hope to add to my repertoire.

He invigorated me for this morning's class. Although I stayed up late after coming home from class, I knew I would be tired for my 8am class – I feel energized. He placed many thoughts in my head: diversity (age, etc.), the nature of the two-year college student, the administrative hurdles.

Yesterday, Monday, I focused on my agenda for the next few class sessions, so in addition to Gossweiler's cheerleading, I also feel prepared, and prepared enough to be flexible.

Ellen told me about next Thursday's workshop (2/1). She asked me to present a group activity teaching project. I will use the cut-up project.

I told students that now that I know their names, they can't leave the classroom without knowing the names of the members of their groups. We are beginning to create our writing community. The group discussions were lively. I wonder if this class will be like last semester's – one that prefers group/collaborative work.

January 25

Two/three more students today. One young man came up to me and said he newly registered for the class, but he could not stay for the class. He would come starting Tuesday. His job schedule prevented him from attending this particular day. Two other young men joined our class.

We reviewed chapter 1 – peer review, jobs which require writing and peer review activities (Bruffee). Students explained their feelings about peer review – the good and bad points. We discussed that this is a part of life experience. We will be more comfortable with it as the semester goes on. Last

semester's students did not find peer review helpful because they thought students were too gentle on each other. This is a problem we covered in class. I tried to prepare them to be more honest with each other as readers and writers.

Matt seems to be opening up. I was afraid he would sit at the back of the classroom with his cap on and endure the hour and fifteen minutes. But he joined the conversations, announced he had little experience with peer review because he dropped out of high school. Later, he asked pertinent questions which indicated an interest/understanding of the areas of writing we were talking about. I look forward to working with him. I hope I will help him, he's in the law enforcement program and stated in class that his ideal job for the future was an U.S. marshal. We discussed writing law information reports for work, as well as writing for other jobs.

Reuben, who originally wanted to be an honors student, hounded me after class about his school/work schedule. He is worried about doing his writing assignments and said he can't do work on a Tuesday - Wednesday - Thursday schedule because he works those evenings until 10pm. I told him several students have this problem, including myself, and it requires better discipline and time management. He did *not* like my answer. I did not like his reaction. He wants all assignments early so he can do them. I explained that he had at least

one week's notice for all formal papers, in addition to the syllabus. He will have to solve this himself.

January 30

Registration is such a mess, two new students and one or two have not come back. I honestly don't know who is in, and who is out, who is absent, who has dropped the course. Reuben did not come in today. I don't know if he is angry/frustrated by our conversation last Thursday. He appeared sensitive about my comments, I wonder if he is "turned-off."

I handed out syllabi to these new students, but they are incredibly behind. We are entering Part IV of the text and #4 of the journal, and all the grammar material. Is this fair to the newly registered? No. It's a financial issue. It doesn't serve the student/teacher or the class. It frustrates us all. Those who have come since the outset hear me repeat directions and expectations over and over again. I wonder if late-registered students actually continue and complete the semester. I will use my own records this semester to talk about this.

Students broke up into groups to discuss Chapter 3 in *Bedford*. I asked them to pick out the two most relevant ideas in their assigned sections. Their individual discussion groups got off to a slow start. Many had not read the assignment initially; therefore, they need to first read the section to be discussed.

Hopefully, a few more group sessions will inspire the students to read their work, a little peer pressure.

I have read the first group of journal questions. The answers/responses are less personal than the other set of journal questions I have used. Terry does have a point. So far the students think more about themselves as writers, yet they still reveal small portions of their personal lives. Last semester's responses made me uncomfortable. These do not. What is the difference? A sense of distance which I want to maintain.

February 1

I thoroughly enjoyed participating in this departmental workshop. I presented my cut-up project to the 20/25 full and part-time faculty members. At first they behaved as the students usually do. They resisted. Actually, they resisted for a much longer period of time than my students usually do. Maybe because my students sense that they have to perform. The faculty members don't. After humming and hawing, the faculty members finally performed in groups. They took 20 minutes to finally finish the task, and they did not do very well. Most groups placed sentences in completely wrong places. Others added sentences to a paragraph. They were okay on paragraph one, the introduction, but it stopped

there. My students usually do much better than this. Last semester (fall 95), students got the assignment completely correct.

Anyway, the instructors thanked me and asked for copies of the assignment so they could use it. I gave them the answer sheet as well – they'll need it. I never did find out if any of them used the project.

Diane presented an informative lesson on learning styles. She gave us handouts and talked about the variety of learning styles in a community college classroom. We all agreed that this is a constant challenge.

Another new student too – actually two new students. Registration ends Friday 2/2, maybe by my next class I will know who really is in my class.

February 6

Reviewed grammar. I always ask the class if they have ever seen grammar lessons in their former life. Many say, yes – those from ESL or developmental English classes. Students normally cover grammar as a part of their curriculum. I continually (as in past semesters) write the charts on the board. Students take notes. We refer to the text. *But*, are they "getting it"? I'm not sure. Ever since writing my first paper for Dulce Cruz on grammar/standard English I am beginning to doubt this adventure into grammar. I still believe I need to review grammar

and demonstrate some problems students have with grammatical construction, but do they work it out in their own writing?

Last semester several students had the same problems over and over again. As many times as I gave them goals, explained the problems in class, they kept making these same problems over and over again.

I'm also realizing that last semester's class was my favorite. Over the past few years I have never had a class that worked so well together. They were motivated, willing to participate, wiling to share, a true community of writers.

This semester's class is facing the awkwardness of the newly gathered. The true reason for this is the extension of the registration process. New students arrive every class period. Some have "dropped." None of us – including me – know who/where we are as a group. It's February 6, and they need to know each other if we can do our projects/discussions.

I reworked the syllabus to account for this turmoil. Not a big problem because I only teach one course. If I worked full time, I think this could be a serious adjustment.

Gossweiler has sympathized with my situation. He's a maverick and says to me "Well, complain." or "Do this or Do that." I keep reminding him that I am an adjunct and *powerless*. Moreover, I want a full-time job so I need to restrain myself. I've always felt a part of the Alexandria English department and I feel

respected by my students. Perhaps the administration needs to be more sympathetic towards these academic dilemmas. But then again they have to respond to state officials. Ugh, what a vicious circle.

February 8

I reviewed phrases and verbals today before the test. I kept the chart on the board. Because this semester has had a chaotic beginning, I decided to give the grammar test open book. I explained that when writing you may not know or use all the grammar rules, but you do need to know where to find them in the text. I wonder how well they will do; some students have been absent (I wonder if they are shopping courses) so they did not know we were having a test. I also wondered if the others who did know, studied. They were not told that the test was "open book" until they were to take the test.

I also reviewed administrative "stuff," i.e. absences and survival in this class. I explained that I am a "non-traditional" professor (which I learned in Gossweiler' class) and that does not mean I am easy. I just don't feel comfortable behind a lectern or sitting at a desk giving lecture notes. *What is a non-traditional professor, anyway?*

I also said I deserve the courtesy of a note if they drop the class. Many students see the community college class as a revolving door, attend this week,

miss next week. Every so often, I announce that attendance is essential to be successful in this class. I want them to work with me. I believe that they can be successful, and I do, with all my heart. I understand that I need to motivate them, but they also need to motivate themselves. I view this as a partnership.

One thing I really need to focus on, "What do I want them to learn about grammar?" Gosh, I am realizing that I'm not as strident as I have been in the past. I need to review my performance in the class. Am I sending a message to my students that it is or is not an important issue. Am I ambivalent; therefore, my students will be?

February 13

Students drift in late – 10 or 15 minutes into the class. When I enter at 8am I usually have only 4 or 5 in the room. As time progresses more students arrive. I try to respect the fact that many are late because of family or traffic or work, but this does frustrate me.

I reviewed the editing/mechanics material. I drew a chart on the board and then paired students up. I assigned a pair a segment of the text and said they are to review and highlight for the class the pertinent material about the section. When they were finished I wrote what they said on the chart. It worked well. They picked out the important aspects of each category and led the class

discussion. Students asked each other questions as well as asking me questions about an editing issue.

I handed back their grammar tests and then explained that past students have done well in the course even though they did not do well on these two tests. (mechanics and grammar) I told them to hang in with me...I want them to succeed.

The results of the grammar test were not too bad, only 3 students received really low grades (below 60). I'm not worried because their writing indicates that they have some working knowledge about the skills for writing.

February 15

Six students have stopped coming to class. I have not heard from them, and I don't know if they are coming back. Sometimes they come for a while and then stop, and then come back. It's so confusing. I don't want to discourage students, but I also refuse to lower my standards. This refusal may scare people off. What is going on? Are students taking this process seriously? Perhaps I don't appear serious enough. I don't want to be stern and stand-offish, but I don't want to be their "best friend" either. I hope the work challenges them.

What is the profile of the student who stays...completes the course? What motivates them to remain and work in this course, as well as other courses?

Does the administration care about this issue? Do they just want to get students and their tuition in the door and then leave the problem of retention to the faculty?

I need to seriously investigate this issue. In the past my classes start out with large numbers – 28 – but after the drops I normally finish the semester with 20 or so students. Yet, because of the snow storm, this semester I am only starting with 23 on my registrar list. Two left after the first class. Four or five more since then. Therefore, I may only have somewhere between 12-15 students by the end of the semester. Sure, this is the ideal number for a comp class, but I don't like the process by which I arrive at this number.

Today, they are doing the mechanics test collaboratively. I have students in groups of 3 to work on the answers. Students seem surprised whenever I make this test assignment. Yet, as I observe right now, they are working well together. They are negotiating their answers; some students seem more quiet than others, but not a problem because eventually they do offer a suggestion. Three is a good number for this, one or two participants do seem too quiet though (Jaime, Alex) and they may be my weaker less assured students. Ah, I now see Alex offering a comment, good. Hiathum takes control of his group – speaking Arabic to one of his partners – then switching to English to speak to another student (of African decent). Interesting switching.

After class I spoke to Ellen about the drop rate in my class. She said that I looked worried about it, "I see you look really concerned about this." She asked if it was a large amount, and I said," yes, 6." She said that it couldn't be my teaching because I had always received "terrific" evaluations from my faculty and student reviews. She offered to help me investigate.

But, I wonder what turns the students off in composition? Why do they drop after the first few classes? fear, intimidation?

February 20

We reviewed each "College For" essay, I started with the Trudeau cartoon. This was a good opening. Students began to analyze the cartoon and read the significance of it. As an ice-breaker this works.

I asked them to apply each essay to the question, "What is college for?"

On the Walker essay some students did not look at Dee/Wangero negatively. They thought she wanted the quilts and butter churn because she was interested in her culture. Initially, they did not see how her interest was superficial. As the class went on Dee's behavior sparked more critical attention.

hooks' essay confused this class, especially when she talks about domination/oppression in the classroom. I asked them if I could explain it to them; they said yes. So I did. I reviewed Friere, and hooks' desire for her students to look at

education and life critically. I connected it to the cartoon. I then said this is my goal also, look at education and life critically, be active participants, not passive receivers.

I handed back papers, and reviewed my grading process again. I also told them about the goals section of this grading.

Matt and I talked briefly and I told him he had good writing skills, and I know he can improve. He seemed surprised at my comments.

Ha seems so immature. He does the question sheet assignment, while setting right next to me! He grabbed the mechanics tests off the desk without even asking. I told him to put them back; I wasn't ready to distribute them. He appears impulsive as well as immature.

The first batch of essays were in the "C/D" and "D" range. No great writers, but no hopeless ones either. I know they were disappointed with their grades, but I wanted to give them an honest assessment early on in the semester.. I refuse to demoralize them though.

February 22

This will be a slow semester. With my dwindled down class size, with the number of absences, and with the skills the students have/don't have, I am facing a challenge.

We have begun our study of language with the Mellix, Jones, Smitherman, Simon essays. Last semester's students were all spit and fire; this semester, I am pulling teeth to get some discussion comments out of the students.

We now sit in a circle. I have prepared discussion questions, and I am still doing most of the talking. T is is *not* good. A few times Alex speaks up, and I nod my head enthusiastically. Mutumbo speaks once in a while. Most of them are quiet, or sleepy! Maybe I should bring in a coffee cart, or a box of donuts... get them some caffeine and sugar. Finally, Dallas did start a conversation, he took the white male "Why am I always to blame" position on standard English. He mentioned that Farrakhan uses standard English to separate and divide. I asked "What about Pat Buchanan?" The students finally picked up on the issues of ownership of language and went on. Mutumbo brought up a terrific point about the "master's" language and then spoke about how the U.S. is viewed by other countries and the immigrants from those countries. He was remarkable. Juao (from Portugal) offered his views, Alex (from El Salvador) offered his.

Finally a conversation was off, it took about 40 minutes into the class time, but it was worth it.

I told them to reread Smitherman for next Tuesday and view her essay in terms of our discussion. I want them to understand the dynamics of "ownership"

of language. The loaded terms of correct/incorrect, proper/improper, standard/ non-standard English speaks to them.

I want them to see academic language as another language with its own rules and regulations. BE has its own codes, street language used by Hispanics has its own codes. So does academic language. They need have the ability to learn and use the codes whenever they need to.

February 27

A full house. Tuesdays seem to be the day that all the students make it to class. At the end of this class, I spoke to them about the number of absences and my concerns about how we are going to cover the material if people are constantly absent. Tiffany showed up after missing 2 weeks of school. She had an appendectomy. She never called me or left a message at the department, but came in today apologizing for her absences. First, I was surprised to see her since I had not heard from her. Second, I was surprised at her confidence that she could make up the two weeks of work. Her first few weeks did not demonstrate much maturity on her part. Her work is in need of serious polishing and refining. Since she has been home taught during her k-12 years, she probably has little concept of the continuity of class meetings and moving down a syllabus.

We discussed the Smitherman essay. The class was quiet at first; it took a good 25 minutes to get the students to accept the discussion as their own. I kept prodding and digging. Boy, do I have to work this crowd!

We discussed the issue of performance. At first they brought up the superficial reasons for performance – entertainment – then I tried to make it more personal. Then they understood their own actions as performances.

Next we talked about standard English. Why is it important? Students basically viewed it as a common form of communication. They could not get to economic issues involved, i.e. good/better jobs. At first my questions to stimulate the discussion were not good. Finally, I was able to fine tune what I wanted to ask. But Dulce would wonder why they do not see the connection between the two. Maybe because it is so ingrained within our culture, that they don't realize it. Or maybe they are not as sophisticated as my other classes who understood the concept.

On that line, I am concerned how well I can work with this class. Their skills are all about the "C/C-" range. They can write, but their style is still in the immature/inexperienced range. I need to spend more time in workshops with this group. I plan to dedicate Thursday to a workshop. But, now I wonder do I need to readjust my syllabus again? Probably. There is no perfect syllabus.

February 29

Drafts of the Villanueva/Rodriguez papers are due today. I was surprised that only one student chose Villanueva. Every other student chose to write about Rodriguez's essay. Last semester, I had about half and half. This class didn't care for Villanueva's essay, and so I asked them "Why?"

Their first response was that Rodriguez's personal experiences with bilingual education spoke to their own. Several Latino students said that they went to parochial schools and their teachers were similar to his. They were separated for bilingual education, and they didn't like it.

Other students felt Rodriguez's essay was more down to earth. They appreciated the visual imagery in the essay, and Rodriguez speaks for himself, not for others. These are interesting observations because this particular class is about half non-native speakers of English and half native speakers. Each group felt Rodriguez was more approachable. Dallas compared his West Virginia language roots to Rodriguez's, an interesting comparison.

They felt Villanueva's language was "too strong." He "tries to speak for everyone." These reactions were helpful in discussing Villanueva's work. I tried to demonstrate by using the melting pot/stew analogy how Villanueva was respectful of each community's offering to the whole. They agreed but felt that his work encouraged fragmentation.

Perhaps community college students come to school to melt, become a full-fledged member of the pot. Their reaction was more conservative than I anticipated. No rebel here...I was the only one...and they did not accept my support of Villanueva's work. I can accept this, but I do wonder about whether or not they realize what they are willing to give up.

We have begun the habit of sitting in a circle, for this group this is a good classroom position. First we reviewed what to look for in a paper. We passed drafts around the circle several times. I told students to review their colleague's work seriously, "Be gentle, but firm."

After they passed the drafts around a couple of times, I asked the students if they knew each other's name. They admitted that they knew one or two people's name, but not the whole class. So, I indicated that we need to know each other's name, now, before we begin the Inquiry Project. I went around the circle and introduced each student. I watched the others 'mouthed" the names they did not know. I did it a second time. Ariel asked if we could have place cards to help next week. Everyone agreed. So I said we would begin Tuesday.

I thought that this would embarrass them, so I never asked them to make place cards. I underestimated their need for community. This is an important issue to investigate, especially since this class is a little more reticent to speak out, to participate.

Finally, I gave them the option of choosing one of the two IQP projects I made up. They could choose an investigation of the campus and its organization or current issues such as welfare reform, immigration policy. They choose the second group without hesitation. They seem to want the challenge.

Have I underestimated them? Has their shyness intimidated me? I need to constantly review these questions for the rest of the semester.

March 5

Once again a quiet class period. I see that the students have read the material, but I can't get them to discuss the issues. I give them a question sheet to fill out while they are reading the essays. Then I prepare a separate discussion sheet for the class meeting. I prepare questions to stimulate discussion, but the students just stare down at their books. When called upon, they do answer. Few offer spontaneous comments. If they do, I respond positively, trying my best to encourage more discussion.

I feel like a stage actor who knows she is "dying" on the stage, or a comedian whose audience doesn't "get the joke." I'm frustrated with this group. A good day with them is like a mediocre day with last semester's class. I'm working harder with this group than the last one. Actually, this group is the quietest one I have ever had teaching. It can't be the make up of the

multicultural aspects; I've had much more diversity in the past. Perhaps because this is the youngest group I've ever had. No adult learners to get the group going. These students appear more immature in their work as well as in their class behavior.

Maybe because they are younger, they are used to highly stimulated learning environment. They may be so used to the bells and whistles of *Sesame Street* and MTV; therefore, they need the stimulation in the classroom. I'm uncomfortable about this. First, I don't want to be Robin Williams in *Dead Poets Society*. I like to be personable and open, but I'm not an entertainer by trade. I like to joke and poke fun at established traditions, but I can't do this for one hour. Second, students need to learn that some parts of life demand concentration, time, and participation on their part.

Perhaps their past educational experiences caused them to be so silent in the classroom. Collaboration and participation may be new to them.

What do I do? I am trying to meet them half way. I can't do the course for them. I refuse to lower my standards; therefore, many students won't get higher than a "C" this semester. I also refuse to write them off. I will continue to work to challenge them. Perhaps they will rise to the occasion.

Perhaps they won't, but I'm not giving up. I don't mind experiencing some frustration over the next few weeks.

March 7

Well, today's discussion about Huck Finn and banned books went better. Students prepared a short issue question: How would you teach *The Adventures of Huck Finn*? What guidelines/suggestions would you offer to a teacher about this book? Students talked much more.

We discussed the problem of being offended about readings in a class. Iraheim said that he walked out of class Tuesday because he found talking about pornography difficult for him. He said he didn't want to interrupt, and he didn't want to participate. Therefore, he left. I feel badly learning about this now. Do I need to run the syllabus/readings by the students to see who is and who is not offended by the material? I don't think so, but is this a power play on my part?

Many students did not have their *OED* word for their definition paper. I expressed my frustration that they need to be prepared for class. Also I emphasized that they need to have their drafts after spring break. We cannot have workshops if everyone doesn't do their working drafts.

I assigned students to their IQP groups. I stressed the importance of collaborative learning. They will need to depend on each other. I indicated where I scheduled in the syllabus class time to work on the project.

I graded/handed back their Rodriguez/Villaneuva papers. These papers were good, as a whole, their writing improved. More importantly, I told them

that they could use their own experiences when agreeing/disagreeing with the writers. Most students chose Rodriguez (I Villanueva) because they felt it mirrored their own experiences and because it was easier to read/understand.

Each student offered valuable comments; even those with editing problems still wrote with conviction about their connections with speaking formal English. I wish that I could keep copies of these papers. They were so honest. Most non-native speakers felt a special affinity with the way Rodriguez had to learn English. However, most of them were dismayed that he and his family gave up their personal/private language which was their culture, heritage. This is something they would never give up.

Dallas from WVA – wrote an interesting analogy about his family's country language vs. the standard English required here in the DC area for his school and business (military). Iraheim wrote a wonderful piece on his native Arabic and culture. He refuses to let either go.

I applauded their efforts in class. I learned from them.

March 18

After reappearing after her visit one month ago, Tiffany showed up again! She came in and sat in the back of the classroom – no books, paper, pen, etc. After I went over the procedure for the definition paper, I asked to speak with her.

She gave me a sad story about how her car was broken into, all her books and papers were stolen. Then she got into a car accident. This was after her appendectomy.

I'm not sure how to respond. Do I tell her to forget it, as I did last semester with Janeth, or do I give her another chance. I don't know her as a student, as I did Janeth. Janeth constantly called me at home or school. Tiffany never left me a message neither at school nor home about her situation. The last time she formally came to class was around the first of February. The last class in February – check notes – she came in to class for a while.

How do I treat her, especially since she told me her story in front of the class? I want to appear sympathetic, but I also want to demonstrate my frustration. The other students have come to class, have done the assignments, and have written the papers. How fair is this to them?

I told Tiffany that she had to do several assignments for Thursday to prove her desire to stay in class. I told her to prove that she has access to past reading assignments either by bringing a borrowed book or by xeroxing the essays we read. Then she had to do the definition assignment. I sent her to the library to copy her work from the *OED*. She did. Afterwards I explained the definition assignment more forcefully. I don't even know if I want her to stay; she was assigned to an IQP group. One of the members later asked me, "What happens if

someone flakes?" He meant if they stop/don't show up for the next few classes to do the work. This is a common question for students in a collaborative effort.

While reviewing the IQP, I stressed to the students how the group depends on each of its members' participation. This class is so quiet, and they don't gel well as a whole community. I'm not sure they are collaborative learners; they may prefer more independent working assignments.

So many of them have an erratic attendance record. I'm trying desperately to hold onto them. Ha left today because all he could get was a "C," and he wanted a better grade. I told him he could finish the class with a "C" and then retake the course again. He did not know this; maybe he'll change his mind.

But, how do I motivate this group? It's halfway through the semester, and they still seem so distant and quiet. Maybe, they seem quiet because I only have 15 now rather than the normal 20-22. I feel responsible for the dwindling down. But I need to remember my session with Ellen, reviewing these student's history. Maybe its just the luck of the draw that I got such a quiet, lackluster group.

March 21

Well, Tiffany has not showed up. I have decided to call her and tell her to drop the class formally. She cannot make up the whole semester within the last few weeks. How frustrating to give the students the benefit of the doubt and then

I realize that I've been used. I won't refuse to give future students the benefit of the doubt, but I won't be as generous.

I gave the students a list of activities that need to be completed over the next few days in order for them to complete the IQP. I emphasized that the students need each other. Yet, I'm not sure this motivates them. They are such a dull group. Even when they are in their groups, they are very quiet. I debated doing this assignment with them, and now I fear I will regret assigning them this project. I don't think they are mature enough to handle it. I should check Gossweiler's chart. I'm sure they would fit among the least mature learners. I don't even have one or two "stars." They're behavior is making me feel inadequate. I keep thinking I should do more; it's my responsibility. But is it? Logically, I say "no"; emotionally, I wonder.

I'm not sure many of these kids can handle 112. I met 2 of my past students, and they indicated that 112 is much harder than 111. "Boy, I thought you were hard," Vikkas told me.

We went on our library tour today. Few students paid attention. I was annoyed because I knew they were not able to do the research on their own. So, I told them that the research sheet that the librarian handed out is due next Tuesday. That woke them up. Dallas complained that he had found his material on the Internet; I told him he had to learn to use print sources as well. He

grumbled that it would take three days to complete the sheet (untrue). I said, "Welcome to college." (This is my usual comment when they grumble about the amount of work, not very sympathetic, I know.)

What truly frustrates me is that I had to redo this semester's assignments because of the delayed registration policy. Then I readjusted the assignments because I realized that this class is much slower and less motivated. They still all grumble. Welcome to college teaching.

March 26

I came to class a few minutes early so that I could prepare information on the board. This class needs very specific information and directions on each assignment. Also if a student comes in late, he/she will know what we are covering or have covered.

I tried to have them focus on their IQP work. Are they ready to write drafts? Have they enough sources to cover the material? Are they consulting each other? Any questions?

They're quiet. One or two questions. That's it.

I said they could work in their groups for the bulk of the class period. (Last semester's class wanted more time to work as a group, so I planned more time this semester.) They moved into their groups and then became quiet. Boy,

this class does not click. I told them to ask each other questions. Examine each others' sources. Share information. One pair of students, the only ones in their group who showed up, was silent. In another group, Jaime sat aside and read an article in the newspaper. I know it was on his topic, but he just sat and read without interacting with his group.

The censorship group – Dallas, Ariel, Matt – worked for a while, then the conversation went off-topic.

I called them back to the class as a whole. I did cut their time a few minutes short, but I didn't appreciate the way they were wasting their time.

At this point, I reviewed their grades on their last paper, discussed the importance of attendance, especially for the IQP work, and announced conferences in two weeks. I asked them to review their definition papers and the comments. We discussed the meanings of some of my comments.

Ok, so I covered everything, but I didn't teach them anything. They are such a dull group, unmotivated, quiet. Except for a few they put out little effort. I have checked their past courses, and they are not strong students ("C's" and "D's"). Their history confirms their present class performance.

But where does this leave me? I try to be organized, lively, interested. I feel like I am tap dancing very quickly and the audience is asleep. How can I

motivate the dull classroom. I'm not Richard Dryfuss nor Robin Williams, but I am a good teacher who feels I have failed somehow.

April 2

Presentations

Well, three students did not show up today for their group project presentations. Mike, Matt, and Jaime did not come and their group members clearly demonstrated frustration. They, of course, worried about their own grades' value because the other members of the group were absent.

Those who did show did a fair job of presenting. Jennifer, Jason, Juao did the best jobs; they had clearly researched their issues; they spoke from strength.

What disappointed me (should I have expected this with this class?) – most of the class gave superficial views of their topics. For example, censorship students spoke generally about parental participation in music, TV and movies. None of the members critically reviewed or investigated their issue. Their answers were too pat, without inferential thought.

Mutumbo spoke on his topic the same way he has written his papers – all over the place. He digressed continually, offered new topics without connection. This is a problem I have continually reminded him of when grading his papers, he

fails to come to grips with this issue. I noticed that few students could follow his presentation.

When I assigned this project to the students, I really worried if they could perform the task. I wonder why I didn't just make it into an individual research project, but I wanted them to benefit from the collaborative experience. I'm not sure they did.

In Gossweiler's class last night, we discussed motivating students. He and I feel that we each have a problem class that we cannot spark, no matter how hard we try. He's much more innovative than I am, and I'm relieved that he is also frustrated by his class' situation. Also, he has much more experience teaching. I thought that with these presentations I would ask provocative questions to spark discussions. No spark...not even a flicker.

Gossweiler and other members suggested a few approaches to handling this dull class. One, ask the students directly how to improve the class. Explain my frustration. Or, two, create a mid-semester review and ask them to fill it out anonymously. I will try the first approach on Thursday.

I also have them coming for individual conferences next week. I hope I can speak to each student about the atmosphere in the classroom frankly. Perhaps, they will feel more comfortable if our discussion is in private.

This is a class with less diversity than my past classes, especially age-wise. I have no mature older students to lift the class up. Most of the time, I've had several older students who contribute significantly to the overall atmosphere of the classroom.

April 9

I walked into class at 8am and only 2 students were present. Lates (within 10-15 minutes) arrived; total today : 9 students. My gosh, this is frustrating. Nine students. Nine quiet, not quite awake, not motivated students. I feel awful, especially after last Thursday's discussion. I thought I had made some headway, asking them how the class can improve. I must be naive or exceedingly hopeful.

We reviewed the Gandhi letter and talked about some of the student's own experiences with civil disobedience. In their native countries, these students have had experience with protests. I spoke about growing up in D.C. during the civil rights and Vietnam protests.

They found the letter interesting and could understand much of the topics I covered. But, I felt that I was more lecturing them, rather than creating a discussion. When I can't motivate them to talk, I automatically move into the lecture mode. Perhaps I should be bringing in props/something to get them going. I feel that I did something wrong here.

While waiting for my next student conference, one NOVA colleague talked to me about the "luck of the draw" and how some classes clearly "don't click." I said I feel that I should be doing more. She said, "No, sometimes these things just happen." I need to believe this so I don't get myself down.

I had student conferences this morning. The information is on the back of their individual index cards. I tried to offer encouraging words to each student so that they would stay and complete the class. I want them to finish. I felt badly after my conference with Everline. She did poorly on her IQP paper, and when we reviewed, she had tears in her eyes. Damn, this is hard. I told her she could rewrite the paper for a better grade. I hope she does.

April 11

Great. We're down to eight. At this rate I'll be reviewing 2 or 3 argument papers for final grades. I've given up on frustration, just working on resignation. Those who come do their work and quietly participate. They answer a question that I throw out for discussion, but don't interrupt, argue with each other. Sometimes I feel like being a "bomb thrower," just to get them going. With my luck, I'd inadvertently insult someone or someone will misquote me and I'll lose what little job I have. Not a great idea, but tempting.

Since we are too small to divide into groups, I assigned each student 5 paragraphs in MLK's letter, and with these paragraphs students were to answer 2 questions: How does the assigned section relate to the bishop's letter? and What are the most important ideas in your sections?

They did the assignment well. Each of the students presented clear answers for their paragraphs. I let them know how pleased I was with their work. We discussed how rereading a work several times (they read this three times) helped them better understand the themes and literary techniques King used.

I was so pleased with their efforts. In individual conferences, they expressed how sad it was that the class is dwindling away. They're doing their work to keep the class going. I want them to stay, I want them to succeed. I know many of them can.

April 16

Ten students showed up for the in-class media essay test. I told them to prepare notes for the test and to bring the notes and text to class in order to write the essay. Many students did just that. They understood that the essay test was similar to the Rodriguez/Villaneuva paper they wrote several weeks ago.

From now on we will be able to focus on the argument paper. I have dedicated the last few classes to the researching, writing, editing of the paper. I

wonder if they will keep up. During conferences, I reviewed topics with them and discussed how they either can narrow down a topic or expand it.

I wonder though if I should have taken time much earlier in the semester to review the basic argument material to get thinking about their final paper. I know for my classes at GMU, I try to decide on a topic early in the semester so I can have time to explore my ideas. Would undergraduates do the same? or would they still procrastinate, and run helter-skelter around the library searching for materials?

My years of experience as a student/writer has taught me to work ahead of time, most of my efforts to do so have been successful.

Ellen called yesterday she asked me if: 1. I want to teach over the summer, and 2. could I fill in for Prof. Diamond maybe until the end of the semester because they don't know when she will return. I wanted to do both, but I can't. I have so much work to do at GMU, and I am taking my final course there this summer. John and others, keep telling me that more opportunities will arise. I hope so...I want so much to finish this program, but I'm also ready to do more teaching.

When I did sub for Prof. Diamond last Friday, the experience renewed my faith in my teaching skills. The class was responsive, attentive, and polite. It was a 111-009 Comp/lab course and the students were all non-native speakers of

English. I felt comfortable reviewing the material, actually I was enthusiastic to get another try. I needed the positive reinforcement my own class has not given me. A few students in the 111-009 class came up to me after class and asked if I was going to finish the semester for them, some asked if I taught a 112 lit course. I took these questions as compliments. I felt successful and rewarded for my effort, a feeling/emotion we all need in teaching or any other job. I'm sorry I cannot finish the semester with them.

April 18

Not much to report. I reviewed the argument handout sheet with the students. In addition, I covered the argument in *Bedford*.

They were so sleepy. I kept saying "Stay with me folks!" "Come on...I know its hard to be awake...work with me here."

Later, I asked them their topics for the argument paper; they finally started to respond lively. We reviewed each student's ideas for the paper and I offered suggestions. I also asked others to offer suggestions for their classmates. Some students wanted to do the typical "I'm against child abuse" paper. I kept reminding them that there must be a logical counter argument in their work so, "Who is for child abuse?"

Juao showed up after missing one and one half weeks of class. I expressed my surprise at his appearance. He said he was very ill (he really did look a little pale). I asked why he didn't call me. He said he lost the syllabus with my number. I said he could have called the English department. He missed the media test which I said he had to make up at our next class meeting. He said ok.

I think I really need to review my absence policy. Gossweiler has talked about it in his class, and community college teachers recognize it as a serious problem. When the class is so small, as it is this semester, students who miss the class time are obviously gone. Suddenly, we're not 10 any more, we're 6. I think I will seriously tighten up my policies. Perhaps three absences and you're out. Save your absences because you may run into problems.

April 23

Now I have to review my policy on tardiness. Students arrive late, 8am is a tricky time. Traffic is always a challenge, but sometimes certain students are chronically late. I can talk to them individually or I need to make an arbitrary decision. Next semester 3 lates = 1 absence.

We reviewed MLA Works Cited page and in-text cites. It went well. Students seem to understand the need for cites, and they also now have *Bedford* as a reference to find various cites.

More importantly, several students have or want to change their topics. I asked for an explanation and an example or illustration for their new thesis idea. Alex seems to know what he wants: Prop 187. We discussed his reasons for changing and I said ok. Immigration's policy is personally important to him and his family. I think working on this issue empowers him. This will be his second paper on this topic.

Ian, on the other hand, is a topic gadfly. He dabbles in one topic, then chooses another to dabble in.

Weary of students moving from one topic to another, I told them that a draft of the first 3 pages is due Thursday along with their list of sources. This way I can review their drafts and see if they are on target. Also we can do a mock up works cited page.

I used some examples of my past papers with students to demonstrate how we can succeed or disappoint with different writing techniques, i.e. using too many sources, over reliance on authority.

April 25 and 30

Drafts were due on these days and the number of students in class dwindled down to five. My god, where are they? What has happened here? On Thursday when the final paper is due, will everyone show up with completed

argument papers? I'm sure they will. A few students who didn't show are habitually absent, but one or two have been steady attendees who have now disappeared.

Do they think, "ok, I know it, I don't really need her help to finish this off"?

I know, without a doubt, that I am going to revamp my policy totally. I will also have to think about absences on important dates, i.e. tests, papers, drafts.

May 2

Last day of class, eight students appeared with final argument papers. A few have resurfaced after not attending any of the workshop sessions. I wonder if I will keep as many of them in the schedule (workshops) next semester. Of course, those who benefited from reviewing their drafts should have a better paper. Interestingly enough good students – Ariel, Jason, Jennifer, and Ian – did not come to the workshops. I wonder how their papers will turn out.

Where's Everline? I know she's been working on her paper; she worked with me during the last two class workshops.

Alex is here; does he have his argument paper? I hope so, I have not worked with him. He could have used the help.

Right now the students are filling out my dissertation survey. Their reactions, answers to my questions will be interesting especially since this has been the "slowest" class I've had in a very long time. Their responses may leave clues as to what I can improve upon, how I can better serve the slower student, how the slower student observes what is happening in the classroom.

I may have to consider reusing some older, more traditional teaching methods: more tests, stricter attendance policy, stricter late/tardy policy, and stricter late paper policy.

Fire alarm, 8:20am goes off - we all leave the class and go outside the building. Concentration has been broken, we come back to the classroom, and they begin again to fill out the surveys.

Everline arrives at 8:30am for an 8am class. Yes, I will tighten up my policies.

After the students finished their surveys, we discussed the issues of what to keep and what to delete from the syllabus next year. I'm not sure how much I will accept this class' opinions. They liked the journal questions, question sheets on the essays, the IQP, and learning to write papers for other classes.

One thing I lamented was that so many students dropped out of the class. Ian said, "Don't take it personally." I said, "How can't I?" Most of them

responded quickly that outside issues affect attendance and that many times it has nothing to do with the teacher nor course. Alex nodded in agreement.

I was pleasantly surprised about the positive comments from the students. Alex kept saying that he enjoyed the IQP project. He liked working with others. Many agreed that the rules were fair, and that they liked group presentations.

Maybe I read this class all wrong. Perhaps they were just quiet, not dull. They recognized that the late registration process affected the flow of the class. I need to reassess my thinking. Classes have personalities, and sometimes quiet personalities do not mean that no interior activity is occurring.

They felt satisfied.

Note: On April 25, 1996 I received a memo from Paul McVeigh, the head of the humanities department:

Vicki,

Tiffany Bailey called this morning to ask for an "I" for her course. I'm not sure why this referred to me by counseling, but she's apparently had many trials and tribulations during the semester. I told her an "I" for making up 3/4 of a course was not appropriate (unless you see a way to do it) but another approach is for her to re-take the course from you next time you teach it – i.e., give her the "I" with the stipulation she completes it in this way. She'd sit in, not register for

the new course. This may be chancy, of course, but it's an option to consider. Please call her and talk over the situation. Thanks, Paul McVeigh

On April 30, I called her and told her the best academic and administrative way to handle the grade is a *W* rather than an *F* or an *I*. She would have to make up an *entire* semester's work. She missed 6 classes in February, arrived on February 27, then did not show up until March 19 at which time I gave her a list of assignments. On March 21 she was absent, and I never heard from her until this letter.

She agreed to the withdrawal option.

Creating Our Own Theory: The *Why* and the *How*

While evaluating composition scholarship, I reviewed courses at universities across the country, conferences in various cities, and catalogs from numerous publishing houses which encouraged discussion and debate about the composition process. The issues ranged from portfolio assessment, to writing in cyberspace, to cultural studies and the composition classroom. Discourse on the multiple aspects of composition theory occurred among professors and critics who examined the writing habits of their own students. Well established critics in the field, including some mentioned in this work, offered significant contributions to composition theory. Each of them changed the way educators across the country teach the writing experience, but each of them wrote texts which primarily focused on the four-year student. Because the framework of these debates occurred within the academic culture of the four-year institutions, the community college writing experience was often neglected. As a result, community college educators need to construct composition theory that is rooted in their own academic tradition.

Because the nucleus of the dialogue occurred within the culture of four-year institutions, I frequently felt like a witness to the dialogue. My experiences

and practices occupied the margins of their studies. Edward W. Said's definition of culture reminded me of the academic relationship between two and four-year schools. He describes culture as "humanly made structures of both authority and participation, benevolent in what they include, incorporate, and validate, less benevolent in what they exclude and demote"(15). In his text, *Culture and Imperialism*, he acknowledges that whoever narrates the story reveals the issues of inclusion and exclusion. Although his work investigates the tradition of governmental imperialism, a comparison can be developed regarding the "imperialistic" nature evident within the academic culture.

Insulated by their own ideas about culture, the participants in the prevailing group think of themselves "as somehow divorced from...[or] transcending, the everyday world"(Said xiii). Dialogue occurs *within* the culture. The academic culture emphasizes the authority of the four-year college or university and overlooks the authority of the community college. This emphasis reveals a discrimination that the many members of this dominant academic culture deny. Most scholars in four-year institutions may dispute this neglect, but I found that it is evident in their work and their organizations.

A list of the officers, executive board, and editorial board of the 1995 Conference of College Composition and Communication implies a marginalization of community college educators. Nine members of the CCCC board and

executive committee represented community colleges; the other forty-one members represented four-year institutions. In addition, the majority of panels and discussion groups centered around the activities of the four-year classroom. The few community college educators who spoke at the conference dedicated their efforts to pedagogical techniques and student profiles; few offered community college centered composition theory.

In March, 1997, the CCCC will hold its annual convention in Phoenix, Arizona. Several important events will be celebrated at this convention; one of them is the "organizational birth of the Two-Year College English Association of the National Council of Teachers of English – a group which has added increased intellectual texture and collegial vigor to the CCCC"(Preview 2). Moreover, CCCC Chair Nell Ann Pickett will deliver the keynote address. Pickett teaches English at Hinds Community College in Raymond, Mississippi, and participated in the creation of TYCA. She plans to speak about "'The Community College as Democracy in Action,'" an issue proudly owned by the two-year college population (Preview 3).

The convention's preview lists 544 concurrent sessions over a period of four days. On their "highlight" page of the Preview, the TYCA recommends 20 concurrent sessions presented by two-year college faculty(65). This is just 3% of the overall sessions for a group of educators who teach almost half of the college

freshmen nationwide. Changes need to be made by professional associations, by college administrators, and by community college instructors themselves to foster the development of research and scholarship pertinent to the two-year school. Hopefully, the inauguration of this two-year college association will meet its goal of improving the professional visibility of its members, and future conventions will include a larger percentage of community college composition scholars.

The 1997 CCC Winter Workshop on Teaching Composition to Undergraduates is co-chaired by one representative from a two-year institution and one representative from a four-year institution. All six of the featured speakers are associated with four-year colleges and universities. Although the brochure calls for educators to work "collaboratively to determine the practical strategies that are most effective" in the areas of assessment and writing, of technology and writing, and of writing across the curriculum, community college instructors are not part of the leadership in this collaboration.

The 1996-97 National Council of Teachers of English features multiple publications for all levels of learning. Of the twenty texts on composition and the writing process, one concentrates on the experiences of the two-year college, *Two-Year College English: Essays for a New Century* by Mark Reynolds. Fortunately, the 1997 CCCC convention release announces a new text by Howard B. Tinberg which discusses the challenges of teaching on the borders of higher

education. These two texts specifically aimed at assessing the value of a community college education deserve the attention of all composition instructors who wish to comprehend the joys and struggles within the community college composition classroom. They also serve as excellent examples to fellow two-year school instructors who want to enter the composition dialogue.

Rarely do the professional journals *College English* and *College Composition and Communication* publish works by community college teachers. *CCC* does not mention the schools their 1995-96 reviewers are affiliated with, but one member [out of eight members] of their editorial board is affiliated with a community college. Of the over 100, 1995-96 reviewers for *College English*, two are affiliated with community colleges. In contrast, the readers and the editorial board for *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* comprise of an overwhelming majority of community college educators.

This journal publishes book reviews, articles, instructional notes, and editorials specifically aimed at "teachers of English at two-year colleges and teachers of the first two years of English at the college and university level" (pamphlet). The editorial board encourages potential contributors to submit "articles that discuss the theory and practice of teaching a particular element or area of composition or literature in the first two college years"(pamphlet). *TETYC* serves as an excellent research tool for community college educators who wish to

participate in academic discourse; however, the majority of the essays and reviews are often written by four-year educators. For example, in the February 1996 issue, seven four-year instructors and five two-year instructors are represented. The May 1996, issue contains contributions from six teachers representing four-year schools and four teachers representing two-year schools. The October 1996, journal includes work by nine instructors from four-year schools, and work by seven instructors from two-year schools. Issues from 1995 have similar numbers. The ratio of four-year instructors to two-year instructors who have contributed to this journal is close, yet it does indicate that the community college experience is consistently under represented in this journal which aims to inform its readers about the two-year college composition classroom. This is not specifically the journal's "fault." Community college teachers constantly combine theory and practice within the classroom, within their faculty workshops, within their departmental meetings. Sharing the theory developed through their work in journals such as *TETYC* stresses the validity of the community college experience within the field of composition.

In September 1996, *College English* announced the reformation of the two-year college organization, the National Two-Year College Council, into the Two-Year College English Association. The National Council of Teachers of English sanctioned this change citing a six percent "increase in two-year college

membership over the last year"(610). This is the largest increase of a single group within the organization. This increase in size coordinates with increases experienced in the community college student population. As stated earlier, community college freshman account for almost half of all freshman attending college or university in the United States. Because of its numbers, this constituency can become a powerful voice within the composition dialogue. However, they must be wary that this new organization does not further marginalize community college students and educators. Organizing an association to provide a "platform for...academic credibility"(*TETYC* 325) should not eliminate the community college's presence from other composition research and scholarship platforms.

Mark Reynolds encourages community college educators to tell "our stories." As editor of *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, Reynolds champions the efforts of thousands of community college instructors and their students. He encourages the telling of "success stories of their students and their institution's out of school'"("Telling Our Stories" 3). Expanding the audiences for these stories beyond the academy promotes the valiant efforts of community college students and their teachers. Neighbors, friends, relatives, businesses, and churches are all potential audiences for the "many good works of two-year colleges"(3).

Fortunately – or perhaps, unfortunately – Reynolds encourages his journal's audience to relay their stories to "members of [their] college's foundation; alumni; colleagues at four-year colleges and universities; colleagues in elementary, middle, and secondary schools who teach tomorrow's students"(3). His hard work at *TETYC* and the efforts of thousands of community college teachers should already be evident to the members of the four-year college community. A call to remind the academic community of the work and successes in the two-year college reinforces how these schools' authority is often overlooked, marginalized. Community college educators have been telling their stories for years in the journal Reynolds edits, and in the book he edits.

I contend that stories are no longer enough. Community college educators gain respect within the academic community by writing more theory, theory pertinent to the community college composition classroom. Adding to the composition theory debate earns attention and respect for two-year school educators. Community college professors are vigorous in their efforts to preserve the value of a two-year college education; they endeavor to serve their students as valuable members of the overall college community.

However, little scholarly work in the writing disciplines refers to the community college classroom. The responsibility to illustrate and to create theory from their experiences rests on the shoulders of community college educators.

The university professor and the theorist profit from an atmosphere of interdependence and interconnection among all professional educators. Eliminating potential polarization during a time when education as a whole is ridiculed by government and citizens alike helps establish a coalition of respect and acceptance within the composition dialogue. Interaction which stresses equality and consideration for each academic's participation in higher education empowers a valid partnership where all voices are heard.

In his February 1997 editorial, Mark Reynolds agrees with the above assessment. His plea for two-year college educators to investigate and to create theory is convincing. Reynolds encourages his colleagues to begin somewhere – anywhere – in the writing process and contribute to the dialogue. He asserts that "to have answers and solutions and not share is a kind of professional selfishness"("Writing for Publication I" 3). Community college educators are not selfish, but they are often excluded from the debate because the academy believes certain myths.

In an attempt to dismiss these myths, George B. Vaughan calls for a partnership with four-year colleges through the development of theory in the academic disciplines taught in community colleges. He, too, cites the many successes of the two-year college, but he contends that these success stories are not enough. Community colleges are often not well understood by other

members of the academy"(213). Myths about community college educators abound: They are too busy to publish. They are less prepared in their disciplines to publish. They are solely interested in pedagogical techniques.

Vaughan deconstructs these myths and speculates that the more community college educators participate in theory discussions, the more they will gain respect within the academic community. Moreover, he asserts that the two-year instructor "*should* break with tradition and *should* define scholarship" on her own terms(214). As a result, "community college professionals can begin to project an image that associates them and their colleges with a community of scholars created in their own image"(Vaughan 214). Their work has earned the right to redefine, or more accurately define, what is meant by scholarship in the context of teaching in a community college and to create their own community of scholars based upon that definition.

Furthermore, Vaughan places the responsibility to ensure participation in scholarship on both faculty and administrators. These two groups cannot benefit from academic theory if they do not form a partnership which enables the potential theorist to develop research which improves the goals and missions of community colleges. He endorses the following actions:

> shed old notions of what constitutes scholarship and research; define scholarship in ways that meet the needs of individuals and their institutions; work to make scholarship an important part of the institutional culture, thereby projecting an image of and commitment

> to scholarly activities; reward scholarly activities through promotions and tenure; allow time for scholarship through released time, summer study, and sabbaticals; and have a commitment from all members of the academic community to promote, practice, and reward scholarship.(218).

McGrath and Spear, critics of the present direction of the community college, believe that 'the weak and disordered academic culture of community colleges finds its perfect analog in a weak and disordered faculty intellectual culture"(139). They argue with the community college educator's disregard for scholarship, and they assert that too much alliance with pedagogy *or* scholarship can result in "elitism" in all institutions of higher education(140). These two community college educators advocate full participation in scholarship and research. They recognize the unique position of the community college in higher education and the schools' ambiguous history, yet they maintain that instructors must avoid "a progressive, if silent, academic drift – away from rigor"(142). The two-year professor enhances her own training as well as her students by researching and testing theories appropriate for her discipline. This prevents an intellectual removal/distancing from the academy.

Similar to the anecdote I mentioned at the beginning of this project, McGrath and Spear also witnessed faculty meetings dedicated to discussions about individual disciplines. After observing the faculty members, they concluded that the educators' discussions centered on teaching techniques and sharing student

profiles. These teachers were "deeply suspicious of 'abstract theory'"(152). They avoided not only theory but analysis and debate as well(152). Once again, the discussion centered on anecdote, not theory, and classroom experience, not "rigorous method as sources of knowledge"(152). Through their own efforts, the instructors isolated themselves from the academic world of scholarship.

How to Enter the Conversation

Noted composition theorist, Peter Elbow acknowledges the conflicts of being a writer and of being an academic. He celebrates the satisfaction of discovery through writing and of exploration through teaching his students. He wishes the same responses for his students; therefore, he invites his students to participate in the same processes of discovery and exploration as he does. He wants his students "to see themselves as writers" by publishing and assigning student compositions as classroom texts(72). I discovered that Elbow's efforts to include students into the academic conversation serves as an excellent pattern for those community college educators who are reluctant to create their own academic conversation. He provides for the novice writer methods and goals which are worthwhile investigating. His work complements my call for more participation in theoretical discourse.

Elbow encourages his students to *use* texts, to manipulate them, to approach them as tools rather than icons(74). He promotes the notion of writing on a continuous basis, as a form of knowing, as a way of perfecting the "techniques and approaches toward getting words on paper"(74). This practice provides the writer with an opportunity to discover an authoritative voice and an ownership of knowledge. In accordance with what composition instructors tell their students, potential theorists learn to adjust and rework their research through the writing process. As a result, a conversation unfolds.

As the writer places herself into the conversation, she must acknowledge her position within "the universe of other writers"(Elbow 78). Experienced writers see themselves participating in an "ongoing intellectual conversation" in which they are valid contributors(Elbow 78). Potential theorists benefit from assuming the role of an academic and from situating themselves in the scholarship of their fields. All of these writers – students and community college teachers alike – recognize the significance of audience when creating a text. Students know that they must assume the appropriate voice and diction of academic English. Theorists know that their critics demand specific criteria in order to become a respected member of the dialogue. He states:

> Academic writing is one where the writer is conveying...data, findings, or thoughts to authorities in the field whose job is to decide whether they are acceptable. These authorities get to decide

> whether the writing counts as important or true – whether it is valid – and ultimately whether it counts as knowledge.(82)

Therefore, students and writers share similar experiences when they wonder if their work will be accepted by those in authority. Potential theorists, and reluctant writers, recognize this situation which may deter them from pursuing scholarship. Without a writer's determination to overcome this struggle, the dialogue deteriorates into a monologue.

Lisa Ede recommends that composition instructors join in common cause to strengthen the validity of the profession. She probes the consequences of the large number of part-time composition instructors in two and four-year colleges. She examines the significance of the composition textbook and the instructor's reliance upon a text which may be outdated, less innovative. In addition, Ede laments the "substantial gap between what researchers and experienced practitioners in the field know about the teaching of writing and how writing is actually taught in many community colleges, colleges, and universities"(118). She also addresses concerns about the ability of teachers and researchers to work together and how one part of the profession impacts the other. Wondering if the research in composition theory truly reaches into the classroom, Ede questions what teachers "can and should...*do* with what [they] know about the teaching of writing"(120).

Both two and four-year college composition teachers – either consciously or unconsciously – determine their pedagogical techniques in the classroom from theory. Certainly, many of the instructors may argue that they have neither the time nor the inclination to investigate theory because it lacks the practical data that they need to work in the classroom. Yet, even when they rely on a particular handbook, they are implementing the theory that supports the work within the handbook. Freewriting, process vs. product, brainstorming, webbing, revision, and outlines are products of one or another theorist's work. Research supports or criticizes any of these writing techniques. In addition to these issues, Ede reminds composition teachers of the additional debates about "whether writing can be taught or only assisted, supported, encouraged"(122).

Community college instructors interested in these debates need to investigate the issues and formulate their own "theory." Speculating about theory, contemplating theory's implication for the classroom, and creating their own contributions to the dialogue emphasizes the alliance potential between two and four-year composition teachers. To include the voices of community college teachers in the published conversations about theory extends the dialogue to levels which can help bond the composition community even further. Their efforts to "probe and clarify their rhetorical situations" can advance the work on how "cultural, political, and ideological forces influence both them and their

students"(Ede 126). Community college instructors will then realize the relationship between theory and practice. "Theory should inform practice...but practice must also inform theory, for practice also...is knowledge-generating"(Ede 126).

Each of my journal entries served as a bridge between my own practice and my own desire to create theory. They satisfied my need to make meaning. I wrote essays to reveal a situation, one that demonstrates the hierarchy implicit in the two-year/four-year college relationship. I discovered that even the term "relationship" implies that one exists. As my studies and teaching continued, I decided that a relationship really does not exist. I based my own theories upon the scholarship I investigated and the classroom environment I experienced.

Elizabeth Rankin's text, *Seeing Yourself as a Teacher: Conversations with Five New Teachers in a University Writing Program*, explores the relationship between theory and practice. She discusses how her teaching assistants react to "theory" and reminds her readers how many instructors react in a similar manner. "Theory seems to be something alien, something other people do"(Rankin 44). Theory is a discussion which takes place on another level, another plane of thinking; it is not the work of the instructor. Theorists offer interesting ideas to their audiences, but they do not offer "practical stuff": "stuff" that can be used in the classroom. Rankin's TA's express the same apathy towards theory as McGrath and Spear's community college instructors.

Rankin substitutes the word "philosophy" for "theory" and asks her readers and TA's to do the same. This less intimidating word helps the author describe "what [she] think[s] and believe[s] about writing and teaching writing"(44). She culls her philosophy from the "assumptions, beliefs, understandings" she has experienced through her years as a "composition specialist"(44). These experiences has led Rankin to define theory:

> For me, to theorize is to enter into a conversation about meanings, whether that conversation occurs in the pages of journals, in teacher talk with peers, or in silent internal struggles to resolve conflicting goals and purposes. Whenever we speculate about what writing means, about how we learn it, and about why we teach it in college, we are theorizing, and whenever we act on what we know and believe about writing and teaching, we are acting on theory(45).

This definition of theory places the term and the activity involved on a level which assures greater participation. Teaching assistants can develop theory; students of composition can develop theory; and community college educators can develop theory. Rankin notes that the language of theory is different, yet she believes that the "difference doesn't inhere in the language – it inheres in the context"(45). This difference should not subdue the conversation. Speaker and listener share in the dialogue thus making theory a continuing process, not a completed product.

Furthermore, Rankin contends that for some critics, theory is only deserving if it is "new"(46). She questions the guardians of theory and the validity of

constantly searching for newness. If a contribution to the conversation is not new, "it doesn't 'count as knowledge'"(45). This attitude certainly intimidates potential theorists in any discipline. Yet, as Rankin suggests, this attitude may silence the valuable voices which "may emerge from nontraditional sources"(46). Community college instructors may be these "valuable voices," and they often work with the nontraditional, but talented, student on the periphery of higher education.

My participation in a graduate composition theory class reawakened my desire to strengthen my skills as an instructor. Like the teaching assistants in Elizabeth Rankin's study, I was skeptical about the relationship between theory and the actual work I did in the classroom. I, too, considered "theory" a negative term. Words such as poststructuralism, deconstruction, colonialism, and post-modernism seemed like terms only a select few could fully understand and use with authority. My patient professor, Dr. Dulce Cruz, constantly and painstaking-ly answered my question, "What does this have to do with what I do in the classroom?" I fell into the trap that most community college educators fall into: I believed that practice – instructional techniques – were the only issues worthy of discovery for the composition classroom. "How do I teach it?" – rather than "Why do I teach it?" – was my question.

My efforts to create community college centered theory also find support in Kurt Spellmeyer's recommendations that critically accepted theorists broaden the discussions concerning scholarship. He even warns researchers to avoid becoming "trapped in theory"(893). Spellmeyer contends that the true "purpose of theory...is not to make intellectual life more open and democratic by enlarging the circle of participants, but rather to invest the culture of expertise with an aura of unalterable permanence"(897). Theory establishes a boundary between those who create it from those who follow it. Often a hierarchy develops distancing the scholar from "the people below [them] on the ladder of prestige and opportunity"(Spellmeyer 900). Suddenly a "division of cultural labor" emerges(Spellmeyer 903). Spellmeyer believes that this division exists between scholar and student; it may also exist between scholar and community college instructor. He encourages researchers to open their experiences to non-traditional sources overturning "every kind of knowledge [they] manage to devise" and profoundly alter scholarship(911).

Perhaps the community college instructor who wishes to enter the conversation can discover her inner voice which Rankin identifies as "a dialogic Other"(81). The community college instructor's reflection, reaction, rejection, or reaffirmation of philosophies and ideals propel her into the act of constructing theory. Establishing a comfort level with the different language is an important

step for the instructor/potential theorist, because theory generally occurs in academic discourse. However, this discourse needs not be exclusive in nature; Rankin reasons that "most experienced college writing teachers live in academic discourse communities, and that is where many of our most stimulating theoretical conversations take place"(81). Community college educators already know the language: they speak it, they read it, and they converse in it. Now, they need to write about it, and the entire composition academic community can celebrate their revelations.

Postscript

This study urges other community college instructors to create theories, themes, and research from their own classroom experiences and praxis. It serves as one example among many possible examples of how community college teachers can develop scholarship from the day-to-day involvement with their students and colleagues. Research and scholarship validate the work performed in the community college classroom and establish authority for a segment of higher education which has been marginalized since its inception.

The classroom activities described in my journals examine an environment which is familiar to two-year school instructors and their students. They help situate the community college classroom in the larger framework of post-secondary education. Including my reactions to my students' behaviors, questions, and assignments demonstrates my own struggles as an educator and theorist. While writing these journals, I pursued the scholarship and philosophies of composition critics and explored them for my own use. For example, I knew that I wanted to center the learning experience in my classroom around the issues of standard English and private vs. public language. After researching and writing on these issues, I revised my syllabus to include these topics. The work enhanced my skills as a theorist and improved my efforts as an educator.

I read material which addressed the placement of compositional studies within English departments. I read essays concerning the role of gender in the makeup of a composition faculty. I read articles discussing the exploitation of adjunct faculty. However, all of these topics were in connection with the four-year college or university; rarely did a critic address these topics in relation to a community college educator. The authors spoke about the four-year student who sits in their college classroom, possibly ignoring the two-year student who works in their college cafeteria.

While working on this study I learned that practice and theory are intimately related. Even mundane activities in the classroom can be transformed into theory. Moreover, the two and four-year college classrooms are significantly different, and the subtleties of each individual student's culture affect practice and research. For example, without Helen Fox's work on world majority students, I would not have been able to comprehend my own students' (mis)understanding about "original" work.

In addition, I realized that although community college instructors are often burdened with the responsibilities of their jobs, they need to validate their own position within the academy. They should not depend on critics from four-year colleges and universities for composition research. They must create their own body of scholarship which speaks to their own experiences within the classroom.

They cannot be intimidated by theory; they need to be creators of theory. Their efforts as full participants in the academic dialogue brings value to a community college education.

My journals and essays serve as a window into the academic lives of one community college instructor and her students. This study shares my thoughts and philosophies with critics who have had community college exposure, and with those who have had no exposure to the two-year college classroom. It demonstrates a progression of involvement with the theory making process while presenting to the reader a population which exists on the margins of higher education. If "the politics of teaching writing is about the most important issues now confronting higher education," then all members of the community must be represented(Slevin 154).

This project examines how I began to see the relationship between theory and practice. I investigated which theories I consciously or unconsciously practiced within my own classroom. It reviews the critics I found helpful in exploring the questions of hegemony and heterogeneity in compositional studies, especially in private vs. public language. I connected the scientific work of chaos theorists to the community college composition classroom. Most importantly, I see my own students as participants in the conversation about the writing process because their work motivated me to improve my position as their instructor.

As a result of the questioning, probing, recording, and creating, I now consider myself a theorist, a participant in the composition dialogue. I served my students by commencing and completing this study. I explored the relationship between students and teachers and how the space between them can be used to create theory which connects them. Good teaching and diligent research serves both the student and the community college educator; therefore, I encourage other community college educators to become involved in the process of seeing themselves as academic writers – theorists.

The community college was the first to experience the trials and traumas of "open access" education. The community college was the initiator of including the adult learner in the classroom. The community college demonstrates the significance of diversity within the classroom. The community college thrives on its multicultural population. The community college constantly faces the challenges of prov ing appropriate and relevant educational experiences for those students in ESL classes, developmental classes, and remedial classes. The community college is the home to thousands of women who enter the academic world for the first time. The community college is the safety net for all of those students who once thought that they were not able to enter post-secondary school.

The professors and instructors of all these representative groups have so much to offer their colleagues in two-year and four-year colleges through

scholarship and research. Community college faculty members who create theory become more integrated within their own disciplines. They gain authority; they gain respect.

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SEEKING AUTHORITY IN COMPOSITION THEORY:
LEADERSHIP FROM THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE CLASSROOM

by

Victoria N. Salmon
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of
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Committee:

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